PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

APRIL
10th
1922
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Adventure

H. D. Couzens
Frederick J. Jackson
Robert Simpson
Captain Dingle
Ben F. Baker
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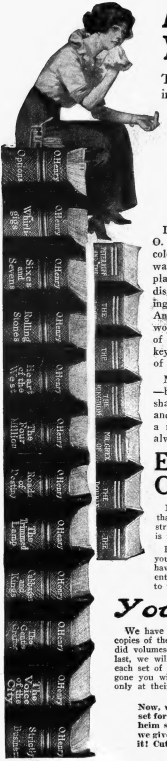

Finish This Story for Yourself—

The girl got $6 a week and was lonely. "Piggy"—you can imagine his kind—was waiting downstairs. He knew where champagne and music could be had. But that night she didn't go. That was Lord Kitchener's doing. But another night? O'Henry tells about it in a story. Read it.

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Like the Caliph of ancient Bagdad was O. Henry. He has explored the byways of colorful New York. He has walked the water-front, dropped into strange eating places on the Bowery; he has sat for hours, disguised as a tramp, on a park bench, waiting for the adventure around the corner. And he always found it. The city was his world, and it gave him tribute of rich store of material, unfailing inspiration and the key to that inner life which remains to most of us a sealed book.

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$250.00 for the First Prize
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The purpose of this contest is to find out what it is about O. Henry that appeals to so many people. No writer of the short story since the world began has had so many admirers. We want to know why.

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ADV. 4-22

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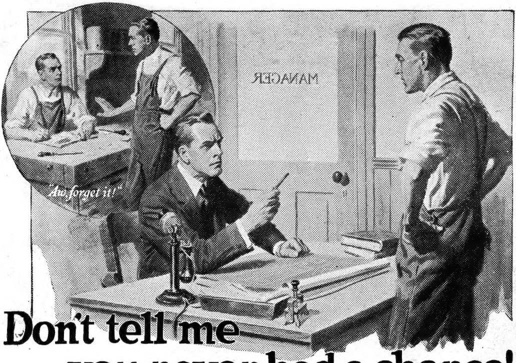

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- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
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- ☐ Teacher

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ADVENTURE
April 10th, 1922

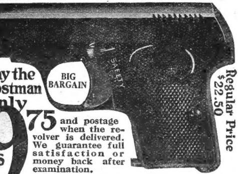
Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 34
Number 1

Send No Money

for this 25 Cal. regulation blue steel

Automatic Revolver



Pay the Postman only $9.75 and postage when the revolver is delivered. We guarantee full satisfaction or money back after examination.

Keep one of these brand new safety revolvers in your home and be fully protected against burglars, thieves and hold-up men. It's a terrible fright to wake up in the night—hear noises down stairs or in the next room—and realize your neglect has left you wholly UNPROTECTED. One of these revolvers will fully protect you.

Shoots Quick—7 Shots in 3 Seconds

Just pull the trigger. Each shot automatically ejects the cartridge and loads ready for the next shot.

This revolver HAS DOUBLE SAFETY and is practically "fool-proof" against accidents. Perfect grip, accurate aim. Handsome blue steel gun metal finish. Rifled barrel, checkered grips, safety lever. Holds 7 cartridges. Small, compact, fits in vest pocket, lies flat and will not bulge out pocket. Shoots al. standard makes of Auto Cartridges. Fine for target practice.

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Order today. Just send your name and address and say which automatic you want.

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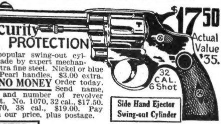

Has popular swing-out cylinder, made by expert mechanics, of extra fine steel. Nickel or blue finish. Pearl handles, $3.00 extra.

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GUARANTEE We guarantee absolute satisfaction after examination or your money back. Rush your order today.

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The best way to get rid of dandruff is to dissolve it. To do this, just apply a little Liquid Arvon at night before retiring; use enough to moisten the scalp, and rub it in gently with the finger tips.

By morning, most, if not all, of your dandruff will be gone, and three or four more applications should completely remove every sign and trace of it.

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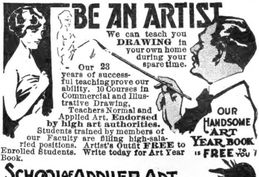
The R. L. Watkins Co., Cleveland, Ohio



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Strongfortism, The Modern Science of Health Promotion, has lifted thousands of weak, ailing, discouraged men out of the bog of hopelessness and despair and placed them on the Straight Road to Health, Happiness, and Prosperity. Strongfortism has aided Nature in overcoming such ailments as Catarrh, Constipation, Indigestion, Rupture, Nervousness, Poor Memory, etc., and the results of neglecting the body. Strongfortism has given them renewed confidence, vitality, ambition, success; and fitted them for the responsibilities of life. It can do the same for you, irrespective of your age, occupation or surroundings. I guarantee it.

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....**Pimples**
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....**Flat Feet**
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....**Gastritis**
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Free: Write Bauer & Black, Chicago, Dept. 4, for valuable book, "Correct Care of the Feet."

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If You Can Tell it from a GENUINE DIAMOND Send it back

To prove our blue-white MEXICAN DIAMOND cannot be told from a GENUINE DIAMOND and has same DAZZLING RAINBOW FIRE, we will send a selected 1 carat gem in ladies Solitaire Ring, (Cat. price $5.26) for **Half Price to Introduce, $2.63,** or in Gents Heavy Tooth Belcher Ring (Cat. Price $6.50) for **$3.25.** Our finest 12k Gold Filled mountings. GUARANTEED 20 YEARS. SEND NO MONEY. Just mail postcard or this ad. State Size. We will mail at once. When ring arrives deposit $2.63 for Ladies ring or $3.25 for Gents with postman. If not pleased return in 2 days for money back less handling charges. Write for **Free** catalog. **Agents Wanted.**

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Ancient Arms and Armor, Etc., Bought, sold and exchanged. Always a large stock on hand. Write for particulars.

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City.......................... *State*..........

It may be worth $500.00 to you

Suppose you are offered a job with good pay, a real future, and pleasant, interesting work.

Suppose this job keeps you healthy and happy, outdoors in the fresh air and sunlight.

Suppose you can earn all the money you want, work as many hours a day as you like, and take off as many days as you please, with no one to order you around.

Suppose you need no experience and no capital, and yet will be helped to build up for yourself a business of your own, permanent and growing, paying you a regular income.

Isn't that the kind of a job you want?

Well, take your pencil, cross out every **"suppose"** in this ad. There is no supposition about what remains. It is a fact.

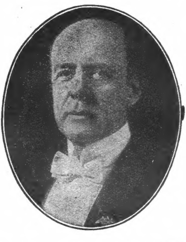
I am actually offering you this job right now!

I can prove to you that on this very job many other men and women, situated just like yourself, are earning $50.00—$100.00—$200.00 a year for spare time, and $2,000 to $5,000 for full time. I can give you their names and addresses, and even show you their pictures. It is really true

To get started, all they did was to sign a coupon like the one above, and send it in to us promptly. You do the same, and before the end of another month you will be looking back on the day you read this ad as one of the luckiest days in your life, because very soon you will be earning from $100.00 to $5,000.00 a year, according to the time and effort you can give to the work.

Sign the above coupon and mail it now.

How To Do Things Successfully



The first requisite for success, the one thing above all else which is necessary for success, is to have the faith, belief and confidence in your ability to succeed.

You may have every other requirement necessary—education, experience, special training, but unless you have this faith, belief and confidence in your ability to succeed, you will fail. Nothing else is possible under the universal law you use.

This faith, belief and confidence may be something you have known and realized, or you may not even have suspected its presence, but **it must be there** or success will not come to you. You know this is true.

You may have thought, at times, success was only bestowed by some blind Goddess of Luck who either forgot or overlooked you, but deep down in your heart and soul you knew better.

You know whenever this faith, belief and confidence possessed your soul you always succeeded; and whenever it did not, you always failed, either wholly or partially.

Many persons start a thing in the belief it (the thing, not themselves) will succeed and carry them on to success with it, but they usually find so many "impossibles" in their pathway that they get "cold feet" and quit.

You know this is true, for everyone has had similar experiences of some kind.

The real solution of "How to do things successfully," lies in learning how to create this consciousness, this feeling, of faith, belief and confidence in your ability to win success, and

Create it so strong, powerful and lasting that, no matter what "impossibles" you may encounter, you will hold your faith, belief and confidence in your ability to master them and so win your success in everything you desire.

The creating of such a consciousness, feeling and faith, based on reason, logic, equity, justice and harmony—not the blind faith of the ignorant and undeveloped soul, but the faith which is based on an intelligent knowledge of and practical experience in the use of universal laws—is one of the things taught by the **Sears Philosophy,** founded by that **Master Psychologist** and world's greatest **Psycho-Analyst and Psycho-Synthesis Expert,** Dr. F. W. Sears.

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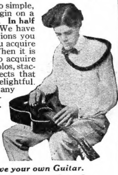
YOU CAN PLAY THE HAWAIIAN GUITAR

JUST LIKE THE HAWAIIANS!

Because Our Native Hawaiian Instructors Will Help You



Our method of teaching is so simple, plain and easy that you begin on a piece with your first lesson. **In half an hour you can play it!** We have reduced the necessary motions you learn to **only four**—and you acquire these in a few minutes. Then it is **only a matter of practice** to acquire the weird, fascinating tremolos, staccatos, slurs and other effects that make this instrument so delightful. The Hawaiian Guitar plays any kind of music, both the melody and the accompaniment.

FREE **Our complete course of 52 lessons includes FREE a beautiful Hawaiian Guitar, all the necessary picks and steel bar and 52 pieces of Music.** ***Special arrangement for lessons if you have your own Guitar.***

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Please send me full information about your 52 easy lessons and FREE GUITAR OFFER.

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ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER make it possible for you to prepare adequately for your future, by monopolizing the great subscription purchases which are being made yearly in your territory.

Among other things, our plan makes it possible for you to monopolize the subscription business of your community.

Lack of space makes it impossible to say more here than barely to suggest the method we would like to explain to you in detail. Write to-day for full particulars of this remarkable plan for establishing either a profitable, dignified business, or a dependable, spare-time "side line."

Old age, statistics show, finds not one person in 1000 worth $1000 at the time of his death; not five persons in 5000 worth $5000 at death; not ten persons in 10,000 worth $10,000, etc. Statistics, furthermore, show that 70 per cent. of all persons who live to the age of sixty have no tangible support of their own.

Employing the plan we propose, one of our representatives, Dr. Carl Scharf, of Georgia, although blind, makes $5000 a year; another of our agents, Alexander Heath, of Massachusetts, receives a yearly income of more than $3000; and these are but a few examples from the hundreds now making an excellent livelihood by this special plan.

Mail the coupon below—now—before some one else secures your territory ahead of you.

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MANAGER, STAFF AGENCIES DIVISION
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Dear Sir:
Please send me, without obligation, all necessary particulars concerning your practical money-making plan.

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Agents and Help Wanted

Big Money and Fast Sales. Every owner buys Gold Initials for his auto. You charge $1.50; make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 85, East Orange, N. J.

Large Shirt Manufacturer wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free Samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

Men Wanted to make Secret Investigations and reports. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former Gov't Detective, 142 St. Louis.

Make $25 to $50 Week representing Clows' Famous Philadelphia Hosiery, direct from mill—for men, women, children. Every pair guaranteed. Prices that win. Free book "How to Start" tells the story. George Clows Company, Desk 10, Philadelphia, Pa.

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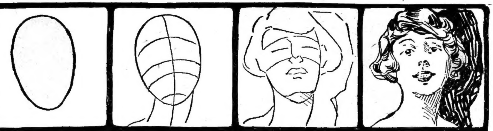

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APRIL 10th
1922
Vol. XXXIV No. 1

Published Three Times a Month by The Ridgway Company

J. H. GANNON, President
C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance
Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian postage, 90 cents.

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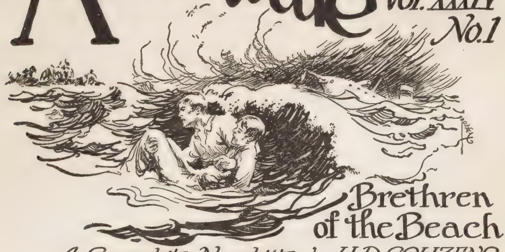
THE gold-rush to the Black Hills in 1876 when men, harassed and shot at by unseen Indians, found fortunes in every stream and valley and lost them again at the gambling-tables. "PAY GRAVEL," a four-part story by Hugh Pendexter, begins in the next issue.

JIMGRIM, major in the British army and American citizen, continues his campaign to reduce the bandits on the flank of Palestine. There's many a clash of brains and subtlety in "THE WOMAN AYISHA," a novel by Talbot Mundy, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure
April 10th
1922
Vol. XXXIV
No. 1



Brethren of the Beach

A Complete Novelette by H. D. COUZENS

Author of "According to the Books," "Just Bait," etc.

EDITOR'S NOTE—In 1912 we published "Brethren of the Beach," a novelette by H. D. Couzens. Before he died, Mr. Couzens was asked by a book publisher to enlarge this story to book size. Always a conscientious workman, he found that to increase its length beyond a certain mark weakened the story, and he could not bring himself to do that. He was making his long, game fight against slow disease, and the money from book publication and the satisfaction of seeing his work in book form would have meant a great deal to him. But he was too much a man and too much an artist to prostitute his work, and he lost the chance of book publication.

He amplified the plot and increased the length by more than half. This much he felt he could do without loss to the story and possibly with gain. He would not go further. Recently Mrs. Couzens asked us whether we cared to buy the enlarged version of the story. A decade had passed since the original novelette appeared in our pages; many of our readers have never seen it, and the old-timers will bear out our feeling that its immense popularity fully warrants our printing it in enlarged form.

The cover design of this issue is that of our June, 1912, issue, in which "Brethren of the Beach" first appeared, and illustrates a scene in the story.

All men are brothers, but some are finer clay.—PLATO.

PROLOGUE

ONE evening, on the veranda of Lovina's boarding-house at Papeete, a part of this tale was told. The band had been playing, and the place was astir with the laughter of young men and girls; the air heavy with the perfume of tube-rose and gardenia. As a little group turned in at Lovina's a tall, dark young Kanaka, obviously not a Tahitian, with hibiscus flowers in his hair, passed with two giggling girls, stopping an instant gravely to salute the old trader captain.

"Brethren of the Beach," copyright, 1922, by Virginia Couzens.

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Captain Wiggins was a grizzled, bearded veteran of years of buffeting by Pacific seas—a dull, uninteresting man whose thoughts ran in pounds and pence and who smoked a black tobacco that it was best to keep on your lee side. To him a fortuitous voyage meant merely so many pounds sterling; that was his sole interest in the matter.

The "wonders of the deep" and the interest of the polyglot traffic of the South Seas meant nothing to him unless they could be reduced, by a coinage table, into sound English money. If there were any gems in the dross of his tedious recitals they appeared by accident. As the Kanaka passed he muttered—

"There goes a boy who lost me a fortune!"

"Who is he?" some one asked.

"My second mate. He's seen a heap of things, Joey 'as, but 'e never talks. Queer trait for a Kanaka. That's why I keep 'im with me. 'E's loyal to the chap as done me, but some day mebbe 'is tongue will loosen, and then I'm thinkin' I'll square accounts."

And he shook his huge, hairy fist at the disappearing trio.

This seemed promising, and on the veranda the captain was pressed for particulars. He lighted one of his vile cheroots, crossed one fat leg over the other—not without some grunting effort—and in his usual rambling fashion continued:

"Yes—lost me a fortune, Joey did. All by not tellin' me, 'is employer, the 'ole truth. I don't know 'ow much; I never could find out. Some day I'll get at 'is weak point—drink mebbe, or 'e may get badly 'urt—and then 'e'll talk, and I'll go after Matthews again.

"I 'ad the charter for workin' a guano island, away up north of the Line. I picked up six Kanakas and six white bummers who'd been ordered off the beach—that is, five of 'em 'ad. The other was a gentleman born—son of a viscount, 'e was—sickly sort of chap, who forced 'imself on me, as you may say; and what 'e wanted on a job o' that kind beats me to this day.

"It did for 'im in the end: I know that. I'm bound to say, too, that this Matthews turned out to be a very decent chap for an American. Anyway there they all were, twelve of 'em, white and dark. When I put in there later, ten of 'em 'ad disappeared off the face of the earth, leavin' Matthews and this Kanaka boy the sole survivors. I was payin' 'em all good wages, and, of course, I was just that much in pocket; though I should by rights 'ave been in a good deal more.

"Another thing: There was a chap as 'ad tried for the charter along with me who put in at that island to make my men trouble. '*E* disappeared, together with several of 'is crew, and the rest reported 'im murdered when they got to Sydney. Matthews accounted for it all by a story of a fight with this man and then the small-pox, that wiped them all out.

"I believed it till I 'eard, a little later, that Matthews was rich; and then I run across this boy Joey again. 'E's rich, too, for a Kanaka, and keeps 'is money—another queer thing.

"Now, I leave it to you; isn't it fishy? 'Ere's a man bummin' the beaches for years, who quits a job at twenty pound a month a rich man; and the Kanaka with 'im, too. Over a dozen 'ave been polished off some-'ow, most mysterious, and there you are! I thought mebbe they 'ad been bleedin' Effing'am's people till I 'eard talk of pearls.

"Then I 'unted up Matthews in the States and put it to 'im, plain—wasted a matter o' three months, I did, at considerable expense. I put it to 'im as plain as I am to you; but, of course, it was more or less of a bluff. My story wouldn't 'ave 'eld water. Matthews laughed in my face. Then 'e wrote me a check for two 'undred pounds—a thousand dollars, gold, that is—American money; told me to march, and consider myself a lucky man.

"I ask you—if 'e was willin' to give me that much when 'e didn't 'ave to—if the 'ole stake mustn't 'ave been enormous? Of course I made a good thing out of the guano—the plantations were fair cryin' for fertilizer—but it was *my* island, wasn't it? If I can find out what actually 'appened—and in my mind it was a 'angin' matter—I'll make Matthews sing to a different tune."

In this disconnected fashion Wiggins told all he knew of the story. One of the listeners was deeply interested, for he had known Tom Matthews. He had, in fact, been one of the ill-starred party on the yacht that left her bones among the Herveys.

But the tale was incomplete. There were maddening gaps that the captain could not fill, as if it were a picture puzzle of which the key-scrolls were missing.

The captain fancied he had a grievance

that touched his tenderest place—his pocket—and his sole interest was to acquire material for discreet blackmail. Beyond that he could supply only meager and unimportant facts; and Joey, the Gilbert Island boy, when approached later, sustained the reputation the captain had given him for reticence.

There had been a fight; then men had died swiftly of small-pox, and that was the end of the matter. The boy shuddered with distress as he told it. If Matthews had chosen to give him money, that was his business. Matthews was his "good flem" (friend).

That was many years ago, and as time went on there came from various island sources other bits which, while they added to the bulk of information, only threw the picture scrolls into greater confusion. Something of Effingham's tragic life was heard in the Orient; and something of the part played by Frawley; but it did not explain why Effingham had buried himself, and was literally buried, on a guano island.

It did not account for Matthews' sudden wealth, nor the disappearance of Frawley. The story told by the survivors of Frawley's schooner was incomplete and baffling, and once the official inquiry was over they had fled in all directions.

Then one day the listener came across Tom Matthews and his wife in Honolulu and put half a dozen questions. Because of the bond between them these were answered by Matthews, and lo, the picture was complete. The key-scrolls fitted exactly into place. It was a grim picture of greed and passion on the most desolate of island beaches, with a touch, here and there, of rather fine heroism.

Matthews eventually told the tale with all the finer details. He laughed at Wiggins' story.

"Of course I provided for Joey," said he; "and took good care to tie his money up for him so that he can only get at the interest without my consent. Otherwise he would have been rooked out of it in no time. As for Wiggins, perhaps the old chap may not think so, but he got more than he was entitled to. The shell was found before he had the charter. If any one had a claim on the pearls it was the British Government; but if I had told Wiggins and offered to share with him, he would have taken them all, claiming his right under the charter. The guano alone made him a fortune, and far too dear a price had been paid for those pearls for them to slip into his well-lined pockets."

And the listener agreed with him.

CHAPTER I

AT LOW EBB

ON AN afternoon of tropical mid-Summer five men sat at a saloon table in Suva. The sun beat mercilessly on the roof of galvanized iron. All of Suva that remained indoors sweltered under the corrugated metal roofs, the most absurd covering imaginable for tropical latitudes. The shabby palms drowsed and nodded in the heat, and solid objects were vague and unstable of outline.

The five men gulped gin and soda thirstily and between drinks talked low and earnestly, their heads together over the table, often glancing furtively about with unfriendly suspicion at the few loungers, none of whom paid them the least attention beyond a bare glance of somewhat scornful curiosity.

In appearance the group was seedy to the last degree. The men had reached their lowest estate—the inroads of life on the open beach being plainly visible. They were, moreover, of the strange, incongruous ill-assortment that can be found only in the South Pacific.

Chance and common misfortune had brought them together in the first place; yet, aside from the desire for food and drink—especially drink—they were utterly without congeniality.

Welsh, the orange-haired giant, an imposing and formidable figure, had been a bushranger in Australia and served time at Port Jackson. Douchet, small, black-bearded and shifty-eyed, was a French anarchist, late of Noumea, the Government prison of New Caledonia. Davison, loose-lipped, flabby of jaw and grossly sensual, was a remittance-man; and Cox, a quiet rat of a man, whom Davison alternately bullied and patronized, was of the same invertebrate branch of the tribe of Ishmael. The two had been cronies, in a way, for years; but it was a friendship founded on shiftlessness and sheer dread of loneliness, and a poor thing at best.

These four were incompetents—incapables—typical riffraff of the beach.

The fifth man was Tom Matthews, an American, who still retained something of his heritage of lithe muscles, the address of a gentleman, and, in spite of features seamed with dissipation and weather, a pair of eyes clear and unwaveringly honest. His face might have been a trifle stronger, the eyes a little less wistful and introspective; and that they were not, may be taken in some degree at least, as a reason for his presence in the company.

They were, at the moment, drinking up the last of Cox's small quarterly remittance. Beyond that they were at the end of their resources. Severally and collectively they had been warned that Fiji was a British colony, smugly respectable, and that they were a menace to law and order and the peace of mind of the community.

The warning rankled, and successive drinks had brought them to the stage of recklessness and scorn of authority that in hopeless and broken men may become dangerous. They were talking, somewhat incoherently, of desperate measures; and with Welsh and Douchet, to whom violence and crime had been an essential part of existence, there was more in the talk than mere drunken boasting.

Welsh knew of a boat that might be stolen—a large sailing-canoe. With this as a beginning, armed and provisioned, they might forcibly acquire larger and better boats, by progression, until they were able to seize a schooner.

Why not? Hayes had done it. So had other men they could name.

Then there were traders at lonely stations in the poisonous Solomons or the New Hebrides who could be robbed with ease and impunity. There were ways and means that required no more than the taking of a sporting chance.

Matthews listened silently and with a growing bitterness. In his present evil case he had found the company of these men, all as wretched as himself, a comfort, for man is a gregarious animal; but there were times when his gorge rose at them in disgust.

He balked at theft and murder. Life had gone hard with him of late, but he had not yet come to that! He was still able, he assured himself, to face the wholesome sunrise with a fairly clean conscience, though his self-respect was not what it had once been.

Four years before, while on a visit to California, he had made one of a yachting-party that started merrily and irresponsibly from San Francisco for a cruise through the South Seas. At Sydney he was to take a steamer back to California while the yacht continued around the world. He had written the Girl back East about it, and they were to be married when he returned.

But the yachting-party was composed of hare-brained spirits who devoted their energies to draw-poker and strong drink. At Honolulu their stay was only an elaboration of the rioting aboard, and even the easy morality of the beaches farther south was shocked by the conduct of these wild young men.

That sort of thing is naturally bad for discipline aboard a yacht and had its effect on the officers and crew. The owner of the yacht, who acted as his own sailing-master, was the most reckless spirit aboard; and the disorder spread even to the forecastle, with the result that the yacht was wrecked among the Herveys with the loss of several lives, nearly every soul aboard being drunk at the time.

The survivors were eventually rescued and went their several ways, disappearing with something of an air of mystery—a very much chastened party of young men. Tom finally got to Honolulu, where he wrote the Girl, telling what had happened and saying that he was going home immediately after a brief rest ashore.

But bad news has a way of traveling fast. Most of the young men were of rich and important families, and certain things had appeared in the papers about the yachting-party and its ways at Honolulu; and in time there came a letter from the Girl—whose views on some subjects were rather pronounced—the burden of which was that she would never marry an irresponsible boy without one of the virtues of manhood, and a drunkard to boot. It was a very scathing letter and effectually put an end to Tom's hopes; and he loved the Girl very much.

The worst of it was that Tom was in no way to blame for the yacht's disastrous trip. He had been disgusted with the state of affairs aboard from the first; had tried to keep a clear head; remonstrated with his companions; and, as is usual in such cases, brought dislike and partial ostracism on himself in consequence.

In the final disaster he had shown a fine courage that amounted to heroism, but an explanation to the Girl that he was not what she thought would have had the appearance of an attempt to whitewash himself at the expense of his companions, two of whom had perished in the wreck; and he was, therefore, left quite defenseless.

Having considerable money, Tom remained in Honolulu and plunged despairingly into a course of wildness that rivaled that of the late yachting-party. This lasted for some time. When his money was nearly gone he sent for more, only to find that through certain intricate speculations of his trustees there was no more to be had.

He then decided that there was nothing left for him at home, and with the remnant of his funds took passage on a schooner bound for the South Seas. At first he made an effort to keep straight and do something worth while. He took up such small employments as he could find; but a man without money is as badly off among the islands as a man without money anywhere else, except that going to the dogs is a great deal easier where the conventionalities are less finely drawn and one has plenty of company.

Tom worried more than was good for him over the way the Girl had treated him, and little by little he began to lose hold. It is the strong, bronzed men, ruthless, full of initiative and lacking in conscientious scruples, who draw the few prizes among islands. Tom was of milder stuff. The months and years went by and found him an idler, simply drifting, through sheer inability to apply himself, a prey to morbid loneliness.

He had tried petty clerkships, had sailed before the mast, and set up as a trader; and in all he had failed. His natural independence found clerking, under the British system, only less obnoxious than the forecastle of rancid, beetle- and roach-infested copra-schooners.

As a trader he found pleasure in the rainbow-spanned valleys, the splendid sunsets, the brown fishers on the reef and the ever-changing pictures painted with the raw pigments of the tropics; but the loneliness was appalling, and, as he was totally lacking in the commercial instinct, the natives cheated him shamelessly.

He never became reconciled to the meretricious sham of island life, and it was with him, as it is with some, an easy drift into oblivion. But, aside from this, his subsequent career differed in no way from that of many others who have been spewed up upon the beaches.

He found that his self-respect, which he had always cherished as above price, was no great asset, after all. He learned to sponge for drinks as shamelessly as the oldest blue-nosed bummer on the beach, and to take pot-luck with the natives, when nothing better served, without a qualm.

He was not depraved or besotted. It was simply a matter of necessity on finding himself, for the first time in his life, in the need of the wherewithal to keep body and soul together.

He made friends where he found them, chiefly among remittance-men or men with shady pasts. He had nothing to look forward to and nothing particularly creditable to look back upon; but it is probable that he retained more of the rags of his self-respect than he knew. He was a beachcomber, a loafer and an outcast, but not a complacent one.

He might have ended, as many have, a contented lotus-eater, with a dusky female provider; but he despised the "squaw-men" of the beaches, fatuously content with their families of half-caste children; as he did the dull, simple traders, hoarding away savings against days of ease "back home." He earned a dollar where he could, and, craving excitement, promptly spent it among his chosen friends.

Four years of this aimlessness had brought him to the end of his tether, with the sickening realization that he had thrown away the best years of his life. To return home, a penniless failure, with the stigma of the wrecked yacht upon him, was not to be thought of. The warning he and his companions had received had touched the last raw, quivering nerve of his latent pride; so that it was with a sense of shame and humiliation that he gulped down gin in the saloon and listened to the atrocious plotting of the others.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN WIGGINS APPEARS

THE door swung open, and a man entered, walked to the bar and stood leaning on his elbow while he took a general survey of the room. He was short and pursy, with small, keen, gimlet-like eyes, bulbous features and a long, grizzled beard. His head sagged forward on the short neck like that of a great turtle, and his clothes fitted awkwardly, with innumerable bags and wrinkles.

A massive chain of Australian nuggets, with a heavy jade pendant, adorned his white waistcoat, which was soiled with stains and grease-spots. All present recognized him as captain of the schooner *Mamaloa*, then in the harbor.

Presently he came to the table and—including the group in a single comprehensive nod—leaned clumsily over the back of a chair and signaled the proprietor for drinks. The five men looked at each other.

The characters of certain ships and their captains become in time food for common gossip in the South Seas; and Captain Wiggins was notorious as the closest-fisted "lime-juicer" on the Pacific. Notwithstanding, he paid for the drinks with a gold sovereign, sat down and drew up his chair to the table. He tossed off his drink at a swallow and glanced at each face in turn.

"Want a job, you men?" he asked abruptly.

"Wot kind of a job?" growled Welsh suspiciously. "We ain't no bloomin' fo'csle 'ands, an' none of us is ship's orcifers."

"From all I hear," said Captain Wiggins, "you chaps aren't in no position to pick and choose. 'Owever, it ain't sailorman's work I'm alludin' to. It's on an island. I'll set you up, every man of you 'is own boss, with plenty of gin and grub. You'll 'ave to work 'ard and fast; but it won't be long, and you'll all come away with money in your pockets at the end."

"What's the lay?" asked Davison.

"Guano!"

Welsh spat in disgust, and Wiggins went on hastily:

"I must 'ave some white men I can trust; and by all accounts you chaps, while down on your luck, are trustworthy enough."

He looked around as if expecting approval of the statement.

"The last island I worked with a gang of Kanakas, with one white man in charge. They were pretty wild boys—shore men from Malaita, they were—and when this white Johnny tried to order 'em around they up and killed 'im, drank all the gin and quit workin' on the job. They ate 'im, too, I believe. Anyway it was all dead loss to me; so I ain't goin' to 'ave that 'appen again."

He airily signaled for more drinks and leaned forward on the table in a confidential attitude.

"'Ere's the point, my lads," he continued; "this island is 'way off the beaten track and 'as never been worked. A little while ago Great Britain sent along a cruiser to annex it, and they reported it a bird island, rich in guano deposit; which is a fact, because I've verified it myself.

"Now the Queensland plantations are fair starvin' for fertilizer, and none to be 'ad at any price; so I sent along an application for a charter to work the island to the British Minister at 'Onolulu, where the cruiser 'ad sailed from under sealed orders. I've got a few Kanakas; and I want some white men to go, too, to 'ustle the job along."

"Have you got the charter?" asked Matthews.

"Wait a bit! Another man's applied for a charter, too. 'E's a scoundrelly chap—name of Frawley—per'aps you've 'eard of 'im. There's been a long delay over it. My plan is to drop you men at the island with everything needful; go on to 'Onolulu and get the charter and then come back and find a cargo, quarried and sacked, ready to take aboard, so there's no time lost."

"In other words," said Tom, "you aren't dead-certain of getting this charter, and in case you don't you're taking time by the forelock, so to speak, to cut in on this—this Frawley, I believe you called him; and we're to take the chances of some gunboat picking us off and sending us to prison."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Captain Wiggins, gruffly indignant. "I tell you I'm sure of the charter. I'm endorsed by the Premier, 'is own blessed self. I'm an honest man, I am, and known as such. This man Frawley ain't."

His voice rose truculently.

"Didn't I tell you fertilizer's scarce? All I want is a cargo ready to 'and when I put in for it. W'at in Tophet are you pickin' about anyway? I've made you an offer; if you don't want to take it, there's plenty more down-and-outers I can get who'll be willin' and glad of the chance."

"Thanks, captain! No need to rub it in. How much are we to be paid for this illegal and reprehensible transaction?"

I'll pay you trader's wages—ten pounds a month."

Tom rose to his feet.

"And fertilizer so scarce, too!" said he. "What a spendthrift you are, to be sure. Good day, captain! Thanks for the drinks!"

Captain Wiggins' face flushed a dark red. "Here, what's all this—" he began.

"Why, we can't agree; that's all. To tell the truth, I like your proposition, myself—all but the figure. Handling stolen guano isn't as clean a business as ivory-nuts and copra, and is worth a lot more money. I can't speak for these other gentlemen, but I think I'd rather do business with the other man. No doubt I can find him down at Sydney. Frawley, you said his name was, didn't you?"

"Oh, come!" said Wiggins. "Be reasonable, and I will, too."

He paused a moment for reflection. He had been at some pains to pick these men for this purpose; and it was quite true that the price for fertilizer was soaring, the chemical product then being unknown. For him the venture meant a fortune; but Wiggins was not the man to let go of a dollar without due consideration.

"I'll pay you double," said he at last impressively; "twenty pounds a month and 'all found'; not a shillin' more. Take it or leave it!"

Tom resumed his seat and looked at the others.

"Well, what about it, you fellows?" he asked.

"I'm on, for one," said Welsh, and the rest nodded.

"All right," said Wiggins as he rose to leave; "and now that's settled. It's a lot of money to 'ave to pay out, but—you'll 'ave to earn it; I tell you that!"

Cox fingered the few remaining shillings in his pocket and looked thirstily at the empty glasses.

"How about a small advance, captain?" he asked.

Wiggins took a sovereign from his pocket and tossed it on the table.

"That's all the advance you'll get," said he. "It won't make you too drunk, I guess. Be at the wharf at daylight tomorrow. We're sailing at eight."

DURING the conversation a tall man, clad in worn but immaculate pongee, had been sitting near by, apparently engrossed in an ancient copy of the "Dead Bird." When Tom had risen, however, and mentioned the name of the other applicant for the charter, he raised his eyes and shot a keen glance at the group about the table. As Wiggins started for the door he threw aside the paper and rose to his feet.

"Captain, just a moment!" he called.

He was thin to emaciation. His face was sallow, the skin drawn into hollows beneath his cheek-bones; yet it was at once pleasing and compelling. His long, sensitive hands were blue-veined and frail-looking. At times he was shaken with a hollow metallic cough.

His rather tired features bore marks of dissipation, but also the unmistakable stamp of gentility. His nose was strongly aquiline; his eyes steady, and so direct as to be almost disconcerting when the tired, drooping eyelids were lifted. Around his lips there hovered perpetually the shadow of a mildly cynical, half-mocking smile.

As men grow to recognize and appraise each other in an island community, Matthews recognized this man as one of unquestioned standing in the colony. He had the entrée to the Government House and the Fiji Club and seemed to be well known to men of affairs, though he appeared to have no active business of his own. Tom had often seen him about the water-front, always idle, alone and silent.

Wiggins wheeled about.

"Ah, good afternoon, sir," said he; "good afternoon, Mr. Effing'am!"

"Captain, without meaning to be an eavesdropper, I couldn't help overhearing a part of your talk with these gentlemen. I'm interested. Would you mind letting me in on it?"

"Letting you in on it? Why—er—I don't quite understand. The matter's not important—at least not to you, sir."

Wiggins looked uncomfortable and flustered, as if he had been caught in some covert act.

"Come, come, captain! It's about a charter to work a guano island or something, isn't it? You needn't be shy with me.

Have you enough men, or would you like another to join the party?"

"Why, I'd be glad of one more, Mr. Effing'am, if you can tell me where to get him. A white man, that is."

"I was thinking of a white man," said Effingham with a smile. "In fact, I'm the man myself."

"You! Oh, no, Mr. Effing'am——"

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, sir, it—it isn't nice work. This isn't a picnic or a 'oliday cruise. Mebbe you didn't 'ear me very well; but it's quarryin' guano, sortin' it by grades and packin' it for shipment. It's all right for these men as are 'ard up and need the money, but not for you, sir. It would never do at all."

At Effingham's steady smile the captain grew suddenly suspicious.

"And why should *you* want to go off and work on a guano island, may I ask?"

Effingham laughed.

"For the same reason these gentlemen do, I guess. I'm all in—stony broke. Furthermore, I haven't any conscience against making a dishonest dollar in this scheme of yours, and I'll take it as a favor if you'll give me the chance, captain."

Wiggins shook his head, and the look of suspicion deepened in his crafty eyes.

"No, sir; it won't do. I won't consider it. Remember, you men; daylight tomorrow!"

He turned on his heel.

"Better listen a moment, captain," said Effingham quietly enough.

The captain paused, his hand on the door.

"We'll put it this way: Besides being broke I have reasons for wanting to leave Fiji for a time—my health, for instance. Another thing; there was a little matter of smuggled opium a year ago; and another of native women taken forcibly aboard a schooner. You know what I mean, I guess. If the truth were told to the Colonial Secretary it might make some stir.

"Now I'm dead in earnest about this, captain. I want to go with you and no hocus-pocus about it. Make the terms anything you like."

Captain Wiggins writhed uncomfortably. Effingham's eyes were on him, and the fugitive smile played around his lips. He seemed to have no doubt of the issue.

"Well," said Wiggins at last; "if you're so set on it, and you're broke, as you say, I won't deny you the chance. I'll give you ten pounds a month—no more. Come aboard at daylight with the others."

With an air of relief he vanished through the door.

The thin man drew a chair to the table.

"It seems that Fate, or Chance, or whatever you choose to call it, has thrown us together, gentlemen," said he. "Perhaps it is the tutelary god of the beach-combers. Who knows what opportunities may come on that guano island? The most unpromising prospect may mean a change of luck, and we all seem to need that. Let's drink to our better fortune!"

He beckoned to the barman, who brought a bottle and glasses. Effingham threw down a gold-piece.

"Just pay yourself for the whole bottle," said he. "We're going to need all of it and more; and bring a dozen bottles of soda."

Tom raised his glass. The undercurrent of raillery in Effingham's speech rather attracted him than otherwise.

"I guess we all stand in need of a change of luck, as you say," said he. "I can't see it coming through looting guano beds, but here's hoping that it comes and each one gets what he most desires."

"I'd like to amend that," said Effingham. "Here's hoping that each gets what he deserves!"

And to this strange toast they all drank.

CHAPTER III

THE VOYAGE OF THE MAMALOA

As TOM MATTHEWS took his way to the wharf next morning, he had a confused and hazy recollection of blurred lights, much gin, shocking stories and confidences; Welsh's red face and bellowing laughter; of many songs and maudlin toasts as if they were setting forth on some pleasant excursion, instead of the last forlorn hope of broken and desperate men.

Through it all he recalled the face of Effingham, calm, impersonal, polite, yet always with that quiet light of mockery in the eyes. It irritated him, and in a vague, irrational way he sullenly resented it. What right had this sickly stranger, admittedly broken like himself, to touch him on the raw with his quiet, self-possessed, half-ironical contempt? Tom wondered how much of a fool he had made of himself.

Effingham had been courteous and friendly. When he spoke it was interesting and to the point; and he had provided drinks with a liberality that belied his claim of being "stony broke." The liquor had apparently affected him not at all. In the mephitic atmosphere of Davison's salacious stories, the Gallic wickedness of Douchet's tales, the inanities of Cox, and the raw brutality of the primitive Welsh he had sat unruffled and quietly urged them on to further flights.

The man seemed far gone with tuberculosis and coughed a good deal; but he had kept the drinks steadily on the move, and he it was who had inspired the air of celebration on the eve of their departure for the cheerless guano island.

Effingham was already at the wharf when Matthews arrived, and one by one the others straggled down, a sour, morose gathering, red-eyed and tremulous, responding surlily to Effingham's cheerful—

"Good morning!"

With the exception of Effingham, who had a chest, a small bag or two and a camera-case, none of them had more than a handful of personal effects.

They were aboard in good time, and at the appointed hour the *Mamaloa* was under way for her long, monotonous voyage to the island, nearly three thousand miles away. She was old and sluggish, seasoned with all the odors of island traffic. She reeked of guano and the strong, rancid smell of copra and was alive with roaches and beetles.

Captain Wiggins, a taciturn old martinet on deep water, carried himself with an attempt at aloofness toward his passengers and unbent only so far as to squablbe over the interminable cribbage games. It was an absurd attitude in so undignified a figure as the captain, and Effingham took quiet delight in slyly baiting him.

"Captain," he would say when Wiggins, after losing a few games, would sputter about the "dumb luck" of his opponent, "what you call 'luck' is really the science of the game. It is too deep for you, entirely. You'll never understand it."

"Why, 'ang it!" Wiggins would reply. "I played the bally game before you were born!"

"I believe you," Effingham would retort quietly. "That is the sad part of it. Most sea-captains *think* they can play cribbage. But they never can. Now, to show you what I mean, let us play a rubber of three games in five. You will win the two first and I will take the third, fourth and fifth. The stakes will be ten shillings, to be debited against my wages, against six bottles of that beer you keep in your room under lock and key."

The result would leave the captain in a speechless rage, bordering on imbecility; for it was always as Effingham predicted, until, the supply of beer running low, the captain flatly refused to play further against so gifted an adversary.

For Matthews, had he possessed an even temperament, the voyage would have held a fascination that increased from day to day. The charm of the deep blue Pacific fell upon him. The teeming life of the sea; the wild, soaring birds; the far-off purple mist of a high island, or the clustered palms and booming surf of the atolls cast over him the inevitable spell that comes to the imaginative adventurer among the islands, and he would gather optimism from the broad horizons and nightly hosts of low-hanging stars.

But this mood would vary with one of extreme depression. The voyage would soon be over and leave him at the end delving for his daily bread in the uncleanness of a guano island!

Effingham spent his time taking sunbaths, smoking innumerable cigarets, and occasionally taking photographs which he developed in the galley by a light of red tissue paper, amid the protests of the Chinese cook, who objected to his reckless use of fresh water.

He sat one day on the cabin house, tinkering with his camera; and Tom, with one of his black moods uppermost, flung himself down beside him. Effingham was deftly pasting down a leather edge that had worked loose.

"Hard lines, isn't it," said he without looking up, "to have to admit to yourself that you've got down to guano-digging? Eh?"

"Why, yes," said Tom, surprized, "it's damnable to have to admit it. It makes a man thoroughly sick of himself."

"The trouble is, you have an enlarged ego," said Effingham. "You take the whole shooting-match as something personal and malignant. Give a man lack of initiative, too much gin and an erratic liver, and he'll nourish a grouch against the whole universe. He has himself on his mind and takes it all as a private grievance.

"Now you take our friend there—" he indicated Welsh, who lay on his back snoring in tremendous basso-profundo— "I don't suppose Reddy has a single worry in that luminous thing he calls a head—beyond the next meal or the next drink."

Tom looked at the slumbering-giant, whose lips had fallen apart in an animal droop that exposed the tusk-like, yellow teeth.

"All the same," said he with a slight shudder, "I'd hate to be like that."

"That's where you are wrong, my son," said Effingham gravely. "People like Reddy are to be envied. It's the poor, thin-skinned —— with sensitive souls that get all the —— there is out of this life. Let's go below and shake up a cocktail!"

There was something in Effingham's talk that Tom likened to a dose of strong, bitter tonic. It was usually unpalatable, but he felt better for it in the end. The frail, hawk-nosed young Englishman had an insight into his moods that was positively uncanny. At first Tom had hoped rather wistfully that it was sympathetic; but it was only rarely, in a brief sentence or two, that Effingham unbent from his air of indifference toward all things in general.

Tom found him hopeless as a confidant, but there were times when a few words from Effingham, drawled out in his lazy fashion, put a needed stiffening in his spine.

THEY had been at sea a couple of weeks, and Effingham was sitting one day, his back against the cabin skylight, running idly through a pile of old newspapers he had unearthed in the captain's room, when he tossed one over to Tom, who sat close by.

"Right-hand column, near the bottom, over the whisky ad.," said he. "Something that ought to interest you, Matthews."

Tom looked at the place indicated and found the following notice:

$100...............REWARD...............$100

Information wanted as to the whereabouts of Thomas Matthews, late of the schooner yacht *Hyperion*. Last heard of in Honolulu, in November, 18—. The above reward, in gold, will be paid for definite information. P. O. Box 1366x, San Francisco, Cal.

"Of course," said Effingham lazily, lighting a cigaret, "there are lots and lots of Tom Matthewses. Still it's a queer coincidence, finding that aboard here. The man wanted is evidently not an embezzler or a murderer; the reward isn't large enough. Perhaps he's been left a fortune by somebody. What's your opinion, Tommie?"

Tom crumpled up the paper and threw it overboard.

"How the —— should I know? Nobody's leaving *me* a fortune, I'll warrant that. As you say, there are plenty of people with the same name," and he walked away, leaving Effingham smiling, and spent an unprofitable and uncomfortable half-hour leaning on the rail, wondering whether there was more unsavory aftermath to the cruise of the luckless *Hyperion*.

Time passed uneventfully enough on the *Mamaloa*. They played cards, drowsed in the heat or told yarns as they sprawled on the deck of evenings. Tom had heard many rough stories, but some of these were a revelation of the heterogeneous villainy of the South Seas, told, as they were, by men who had played all the parts without shame and boasted of it.

Douchet and Welsh were frankly criminals. The proudest boast of the latter was that there had once been a reward offered for him, dead or alive, of a thousand pounds, for "sticking up" the paymaster of a railroad gang.

Even Wiggins and his half-caste mate, spiritless men enough, took a certain pride in vulgar reminiscences of "blackbirding," or recruiting native labor for the plantations—the lowest form of blackguardism in the Pacific; and it was strange to hear old Wiggins, who, like most mean men, prated of his honesty and fairness, tell in his dull, colorless voice of shooting down natives, among them women, while others were dragged into the boats, concluding with—

"And so, ye see, I made six 'undred pound clear, all told, and only three months out!"

Davison was a stout, baldish man of middle age, with a baritone voice whose mellow, bell-like sweetness had survived all the ravages of dissipation. He had an ultra-British manner, was insufferably talkative and alternately sang old English ballads, snatches of half-forgotten church music or operas, and babbled the most shockingly indecent stories.

A coarser, more sodden figure could scarcely be imagined; and yet there were still nights when he would stand clinging to the after shrouds and sing in a way that brought tears to more than one of his audience and the watch below would creep on deck to listen. But he sang only when he was half drunk, and, the gin taking hold, would relapse into mere maudlin garrulity.

Cox was thin and wiry, with a nose of reddish purple and a perpetual, foolish smile under one corner of his mustache that gave him at once an air of rakishness and weakness. He was an irresponsible creature, cranky and querulous despite his foolish smile, and yet he was the one of all the company whom Matthews pitied.

There was no real harm in the man; his qualities were too negative for that. He was, rather, of the "lost dog" type; and as he was inclined at times to be talkative Tom learned something of his history.

He and Davison had been "sent down" from Cambridge in their first year. They had been mere idlers at school, and since boyhood Davison had held Cox by a curious mental ascendency. It was through a series of vicious escapades of the former's contriving that they were expelled from the university. It was a sufficient disgrace; but instead of making an effort at redemption Davison had gone on the road with a barnstorming opera company, followed by the faithful Cox, whose sphere of usefulness extended no further than the carrying of a banner in the chorus.

When the patience of their respective families was exhausted they were shipped summarily to the colonial dumping-ground for younger sons, and, with the aid of small allowances paid over quarterly, advised to shift for themselves.

The system that produces the remittance-man is not so cruel as might be supposed. The exile is almost invariably a scamp. He has worked himself out of his sphere at home by lack of application to anything useful, but there is nothing to prevent his making for himself a decent and honorable career; only he must not stray from the base of supplies or he will forfeit his remittance, which takes considerable courage.

Neither Cox or Davison were of that stuff, however, and in the long years since they had left home it is doubtful if they had done one useful or ambitious thing. They had drawn their quarterly allowances, spent them riotously, and between whiles drifted into intimacy with Heaven knows what forms of unspeakable vice. Cox, it is to be believed, fell regretfully, clinging weakly to the shadow of a thing called "honor," yet trailing along protestingly in the wake of Davison, a sorry enough leader.

Once they had separated; and Davison, wrecked on a schooner in Torres Strait, returned to find his remittance discontinued. Since then they had both fared on the scant bounty of Cox. This, however, was no longer available; for a short time before Cox had news of the death of his father and a change in the estate, and he, too, could now expect nothing more from his people. The allowance spent for gin in Suva was his last, and the present voyage was a matter of blind necessity. Yet Cox, for all his crankiness, was stoical enough about this.

"Davie and I've been a couple of cads," said he. "It's so easy in this bally wilderness; and now we've jolly well got to pay for it!"

He confided to Tom rather shyly that he wrote home once a year to a sympathetic older sister, who sent him news of an old sweetheart, long since married and the mother of children.

"Of course I lost her," said Cox resignedly. "I wasn't fit to black her boots. Time was, though, old chap, when her memory kept me out of many a dirty scrape."

Tom, mindful of his own case, felt for the spiritless creature a sort of forlorn fellowship.

The white men lounged about the after-deck and made themselves free with the spirits; but the Kanakas, a good-natured, mixed lot, no two of whom came from the same group of islands, chummed with the crew in the forecastle. One of them, a tall young Gilbert Islander, whom they called Joey—a smiling fellow, handsome as a young Polynesian god—had attached himself to Effingham from the first with the unselfish, dog-like affection so often seen and so rarely appreciated among the island people.

The Polynesians are dependent almost to childishness; and spontaneous attachments of a brown man for a white are quite common—too often, alas, taken base advantage of.

Joey became unaffectedly a sort of attendant on Effingham—glad to be sent on an errand, proud to share his tobacco; and when Effingham made and developed a snap-shot of him in the finery of a new turkey-red *lava-lava,* Joey begged from him an oath that some day "Epihama" would go with him to his home at Apemama.

One morning they came on deck to find the schooner beating up toward a volcanic island; the captain, in the fore-rigging, casting for an opening in the great combers that roared at the edge of the reef. Little flying-fish fled before the schooner's bow in shoals, and the air was full of birds. They fought and screamed for the waste that the cook threw over the side. They perched upon the gaffs and cross-trees, and even alighted fearlessly and lumbered about the deck.

The captain turned and shouted to the mate at the wheel, pointing to a short pole on an elevated point, from which streamed the few small red tatters that remained of a British ensign. The mate put the wheel over, and presently they came to anchor within a cable's length of the shore that was to be home, for a term of months, to a dozen of the schooner's company.

They scanned it curiously, and found it wholly unprepossessing.

"What do they call the place?" asked Tom of the captain.

"Give it up," was the reply. "It hasn't a name, so far as I know. You're the original settlers, barrin' the birds; why not name it yourselves? I'm layin' that before you're though—" he gave a grim chuckle—"you'll be callin' it seven different kinds of ——!"

CHAPTER IV

SMOLDERING FIRES

THE island was an insignificant dot in the great waste of blue Pacific lying well to the west and north of the Marshalls. It was between three and four miles long and about three-quarters of a mile across at its widest point. It was fundamentally composed of black lava rock, the summit of a great peak rising sheer from the ocean floor; but, save in the abrupt, forbidding wall of the windward coast, the rock showed only as outcropping in the wind-swept places, through deep deposits of guano.

Seen from a distance at sea it appeared blurred and shifting of outline from the wheeling hosts of birds. Along the lee shore for nearly its entire length ran a narrow barrier reef, partially exposed at low tide, which enclosed, near its center, a small harbor which was neither bay nor lagoon, but a mere opening fed by fresh-water springs where the coral would not build.

Here the land had a pleasanter aspect. The shore was lined with a belt of beach-grass; there were a few score of coconut and pandanus palms, and farther inland the small valley was choked with *hau* and *kou* trees; while ferns, *ti*-plants and creepers grew in profusion. Here it was that they pitched their camp.

The Kanakas, skilled and intelligent workers, built huts of leaves and braided fiber that were airy and comfortable and strong enough to weather anything short of a hurricane. In addition to these as shelters there were four tents, and when these were erected they built a large, open *lanai* for a common living-room. Its floor was a strip of canvas laid on the sand; the sides a series of poles which supported a roof of palm-trees loosely bound together. On the side toward the northeast was a movable wind-break of heavy canvas, old and stained, with many patches.

A surf-boat, considerately left by Wiggins, lay high up on the beach under an open shed which was also thatched with the indispensable palm-leaves.

In a week's time they had settled down to the dreary monotony of their work. It was revolting enough, but it exacted only muscular effort; and work they must, day after day, at the same offensive drudgery, for Wiggins, the exacting, must be satisfied or they would get no money.

At first it was not so hard. They rose in the morning, churlish and taciturn; but a plunge in the cool green water of the little bay and a meal of fresh fish and coffee helped raise their spirits. At night they returned, caked with grime through which the sweat had cut weird patterns, to plunge again into the purging water.

Then, after the evening meal, there were card-games, songs, stories and drinks—always and inevitably drinks! Wiggins, knowing his men and their requirements, had left a prodigious quantity of trade gin. That he eventually would make them meet part of the expense by withholding it from their wages they were well aware, but that was a matter of small concern.

Food they had in plenty. In addition to their ship's stores there were eggs to be had for the gathering; fish swarmed about the reef; coconuts were abundant; and turtles were frequent visitors to the beach. There was water-cress in the spring; a few wild plaintains and yams grew in the valley, and if they craved sweets they had only to dig *ti*-root and bake it.

They planned ways at first to make life more tolerable, and some of the schemes were ludicrous in the extreme. One of Douchet's was that some one take the boat and two Kanakas, sail for the nearest inhabited island and return with a boat-load of women. As they had no chart nor compass and the nearest populated island was Pingalap, over a thousand miles away, the proposal was received with shouts of laughter, at which the little Frenchman sulked for days.

One of the Kanakas had a wheezy concertina; another a small, antiquated Portuguese guitar which it was impossible to keep in tune on account of the pegs slipping. The repertoire of the boys was limited, but out of these unpromising instruments Davison, the musician of the party, managed to coax some far-off semblance to melody; and there were nights when the wondering birds listened to as weird a rendition of "Annie Laurie" or "Nellie Was a Lady" as ever was heard.

There were swimming-races and impromptu boxing and wrestling matches. Spells of boyish humor would strike them simultaneously, when they would roar with laughter at the silliest trifles, their differences and faults forgotten, and for the time they were jolly, if boisterous, comrades. These moods, be it said, were usually inspired by "square-face" gin.

But the change was inevitable, and gradually it came. The stories had all been told and retold. Their resources of entertainment reached a limit. They took to brooding apart, sullenly. Tempers flared out at trifles, and ugly quarrels grew more and more frequent.

Matthews, high-strung, nervous and at a tension from the first, felt the change more than the others. To him the nightly carousals were a mental relief from chronic neurasthenia. His companions, with the exception of Effingham, grew insufferable. Before long there was no way of keeping up even a semblance of comradeship without "square-face" and card-games to help clear the air of the hatefulness and the quarrels always smoldering near the surface.

Two months after their arrival at the island their enforced association had an actual pathos that bordered on tragedy. They were like men doomed to an Arctic Winter in the confines of a vessel. In each man's breast there lurked an intolerance of his fellows. They magnified one another's faults and their own petty grievances, and seldom spoke to each other during the early hours of the day.

If any man touched and brought forth a note from the concertina or the whining guitar there was an instantaneous roar of protest from the others; and it was only after sweating for long hours at the guano beds, and later mellowed by successive drinks, that they warmed into anything approaching affability.

At night the four incapables squabbled incessantly over the card-games; and Tom, in exasperation, would often have succumbed to the same weakness had it not been for the inscrutable, smiling face of Effingham. He could not bear further to depreciate himself under the mocking gaze of those eyes, alight with understanding and appraisal.

Effingham alone seemed apart—detached, as it were, from all the squabbles, indifferent to the affairs of the rest, maintaining an unfailingly even temper and the ability, when he chose to exercise it, of rallying them with a word or two into a better humor.

He drank as much as the others, but it had little effect on him. No amount of liquor could break down his reticence. He kept much to himself, attended by the faithful Joey; and his cough grew steadily worse.

AND then occurred one of those queer freaks of destiny which we weakly call Chance, which not only cleared the surcharged atmosphere for the time, but changed the current of all their lives.

Tom Matthews sat alone on the beach. The west was aglow with the tremendous conflagration of tropic sunset; the huge ball of red sun surrounded by a blaze of raw orange shading into crimson and then to the tenderest mauve. Across this blinding display lay long strata of purple clouds, stationary, unchanging, their edges bright with a thin line as of gold wire. The birds were lazily winging shoreward for the night; a school of mullet leaped and sported in the bay, and the sea, toward the sun, was a long, ruddy pavement from beach to horizon.

Tom wondered just how far such pictures were responsible for his present position. He had always been on the point of taking active part in the medley of island affairs;

but the accomplishment was ever a day or two in the future, and the long, languorous days had melted into each other in a succession of blazing sunsets. Time is of little account where each day is like another.

There is no reminder in the passing seasons, but now there were other things to remind him that he owed himself an accounting. He was done with the beach forever. If he could not pull himself together with the proceeds of his work on the island, he could at least obliterate himself and avoid any more intolerable situations like the present.

He took from his breast a small locket that hung from his neck by a loop of sennit. The watch-chain from which it once depended had long since gone, with the watch, to supply material wants; but he had never parted with the locket.

It contained a photo of a young woman, about twenty-two; smiling, alert, in love with life; and yet with perhaps too much of the patrician air. There was something uncompromising in the set of the lips and chin. Tom remembered her unreasoning firmness in some of their few, unimportant differences and his own good-natured compliance. If Dorothy had had one fault in his eyes it was that of intruding principle into small matters.

This was the face of the girl who had written him that letter, received at Honolulu. As he sat studying it a chorus of high-pitched voices broke out in altercation in the distant *lanai*. He caught Cox's whining treble:

"—— it, Davie! The jack fell four hands ago. Don't be a rotter!"

Then Welsh's strident bellow:

"Play *cards!* Wot the —— are ye raggin' about!"

Tom rose, tore the locket from its fastening and with a deep curse flung it far into the sea.

He stood watching it as it sped in a long, shining arc; and long after it struck the water he still stood, as if turned to stone. Then he drew a long breath and walked slowly toward the *lanai*.

Once he stopped and looked back uncertainly. The sun had gone and the quick tropic night was falling. Then he turned, and, whistling a tune, walked on briskly. He could face the future now, unhampered by a sentimental millstone round his neck.

At the first gray shine of dawn he was wading out through the shoal water to the point where he estimated the locket had fallen. He had found sleep impossible. In a moment of bitterness he had blamed an unreasonable woman for his own years of folly and weakness, though in his heart he knew that her memory had been his cleanest asset and had kept him from the commoner vileness of the beach. That he thoroughly despised this unheroic vacillation made him none the less anxious to recover the locket.

He had half-unconsciously taken a bearing the night before, but he had not waded far before he came to a sharp edge of the reef that marked the end of the shoal water. The bottom fell in a sharp slope, and the color of the water shaded from a clear turquoise to deep green. Time and again he dived without result.

The bottom was dark and slimy and seemed to be covered with masses and clusters of small, round, jagged rocks, remarkably uniform in size, and their edges tore the skin of his hands and forearms till they were raw and bleeding.

He was forced to desist at last from sheer exhaustion.

Near by the Kanakas were wading out, chattering in *bêche-de-mer*, with small throwing-nets over their shoulders. Tom called to Joey, who chanced to be nearest. He explained to the boy what he wished as nearly as possible, describing the locket as—

"All same ten-dolla-piece, gold."

Joey, with a flash of white teeth, slid silently into deep water and vanished. He reappeared after an interminable time, shook his head, grinned and again disappeared, repeating the performance several times without result. Meantime Tom heard a hail and turned to find Effingham wading toward him.

He had returned from a mysterious rite which he preformed twice daily, and for which he offered no explanation. Every morning and evening since their arrival he had gone to the summit of a knoll where the whole horizon was visible, and swept the sea for a full half-hour with a long brass telescope. Tom, who had a dread of embarrassing questions, made a gesture of annoyance.

"Taking soundings, Tommie?" asked Effingham pleasantly. "Pretty deep water here."

Just then Joey's head appeared.

"I think no can find," said he, blowing like a brown porpoise. "Too much this kind shell."

He had one of the flat black rocks in his hand, and tossed it into the shallow water of the reef.

"All right, Joey; no matter," said Tom, splashing shoreward.

"Hold on, Tommie!" said Effingham in so strange a voice that Tom turned toward him quickly.

He was examining the black stone carefully. It had slimy weeds wrapped about it, and as Effingham pulled them off Tom saw that instead of a rock it was a large, odd-looking shell-fish.

Effingham turned to Joey.

"You say plenty more stop below?" he asked.

"Plenty!" the boy replied. "Too much stop. Thousand thousands!"

Effingham carried the shell to the beach, deliberately assumed his clothing and picked up his telescope, and they proceeded to the camp. Keola, the Hawaiian, was cooking breakfast. Welsh stood naked, two hundred and fifty pounds of magnificent brawn, flexing his huge muscles. The others, in their working-garb of dungaree trousers, were passing the bottle for the morning drink. Effingham tossed the rough shell-fish on the sand in their midst.

"Gentlemen," said he, "it is a fine morning. The Goddess of Fortune is with us. Observe!"

His face was impassive as usual, but his thin nostrils were wide and there was the trace of a sparkle in his eye. The others gathered round and inspected the find, silently at first, till Douchet on a sudden broke out in a wild cackle of laughter and danced insanely, and Welsh with a loud guffaw smote him gleefully on the back and sent him sprawling.

"What the deuce is the thing?" asked Matthews.

"Treasure trove," replied Effingham. "The thing men lie and steal and murder for. That's a pearl oyster, Tommie!"

CHAPTER V

HOLLOWAY EXPLAINS

MISS DOROTHY GARDINER sat at an upper window of the Fairview Hotel in San Francisco and watched the gray fog roll in from the Golden Gate. It came in detached, ragged sheets, a tattered squadron moving swiftly—silent and ominous. Tamalpais and the Sausalito shore were blotted out, and Alcatraz had become a mere dark smudge on the murky water of the bay.

Dorothy shivered a little as she watched, although the room was warm and the chill damp of the night not yet fallen. She did not like San Francisco. It had an unpleasant effect on her spirits, which were none too buoyant at best. Long and assiduous devotion to an invalid maiden aunt had given her mind too grave a cast; she took life and its responsibilities altogether too seriously for a splendid, robust young woman of twenty-six. And San Francisco fog is most depressing.

She had been talking a while ago with some hotel acquaintances but lately returned from the islands, and the verbal pictures they had drawn of the long, warm beaches, the gorgeous flowering trees and the splendid hills, orange-tinted in the glow of sunset, had filled her with a certain amount of enthusiasm.

In comparison with San Francisco the islands seemed a paradise. The pitiless fog reacted on her spirits, and Dorothy sighed audibly as she sat alone in the hotel, aware that she was very forlorn and unhappy.

A bell-boy knocked and delivered a card. She set her lips firmly over her small white teeth and made a furtive dab at her eyes. She had barely time to glance at the card when its owner, who had followed hard upon the heels of the boy, bounced into the room, seized both her hands and wrung them vigorously.

"Dot!" he cried. "How are you, girlie? Say you're glad to see me—quick!"

Dorothy's eyes widened.

"Jack Holloway! Why, Jack——"

"The same—I swear it! John Francis Holloway, late of Boston, now a resident of the Golden State. Saw your name in the 'hotel arrivals' three days ago and would have come at once but I had to make a flying trip to Los Angeles. How are you, and how do you like San Francisco, and what on earth are you doing here?"

"I'm well, and I don't like San Francisco a bit; it gives me the blues. I'm traveling with Aunt Margaret for her health; she's an invalid, you know."

The young man looked at her keenly. He was a clean-cut, manly fellow of under thirty, clear-eyed and wholesome, and there was a friendliness mingled with concern in his eyes.

"Same old thing, eh? Dot—assuming the privilege of a friendship that dates from the cradle—I'll say that you look fagged out. You're tired, and that smile of yours has a little droop it didn't have the last time I saw you. Ever since I can remember you've been dancing attendance on your Aunt Margaret, and it hasn't been the best thing in the world for you. Why don't you kick over the traces once in a while?"

Dorothy looked anxiously at the door separating the two rooms and put her finger to her lips.

"S-sh! Auntie's in there taking her nap——"

"Oh, come, now! Tell me, Dot; how sick is your aunt—really?"

She made a little face.

"Why—why, Jack, there isn't anything really serious the matter with her. She's what the doctor calls a 'chronic valetudinarian.' I believe it was you who used to say that she enjoyed poor health. Old maids, like auntie and me, usually have hobbies, and hers is to imagine herself very ill."

She lowered her voice and again glanced cautiously at the door.

"You must never repeat it, Jack, but once in a while she forgets and we have a real good time. Other times we live by routine and formulas. She'll wake up presently and want koumyss, and beef-tea at *exactly* a hundred and sixty-two degrees."

Holloway crossed his legs, lighted a cigaret, and smoked in silence a while.

"Dot," said he thoughtfully, "this 'old maid' stuff from you would be funny if it weren't a little pathetic. Of course I know what happened four years ago was a good deal of a shock to you. It would have been to any one under the circumstances, but I don't believe you've ever been told the truth about it, else you wouldn't spring this 'old maid' talk on me. Tom wouldn't tell, of course.

"I should have written you long ago, but there are things you can't make look convincing and right on paper. I've felt like a coward and probably acted like one, hoping you'd be set straight somehow, but when I saw your name on that list I saw the chance to find out and explain things if no one else had, and here I am. I see now that I should have done it long ago. It was actually craven of me, and when I've done you can call me anything you like."

"Jack, are you talking about that—that yacht? Because if you are——"

"I'm going to tell you the truth about Tom, Dorothy."

"Well, you can spare yourself—and me. I have heard quite enough—more than enough—and don't want to hear any more. My only wish is to forget it all. I find it hard enough as it is. Please don't revert to it again."

"Do you mean to say you've treated Tom Matthews that way—turned him down without a hearing?"

"If that's the way you choose to put it, I have—certainly. Much as I cared for Tom I couldn't trust my future with a—a drunkard and a—a——"

"Oh, Lord! Do you mean to tell me you wrote him stuff like that?"

"I gave him my opinion of his conduct—and yours, and the rest of you. I had to tell the truth, and— Oh, don't talk about it!"

"And did he answer you—offer any explanations, I mean?"

"No!"

Holloway rose and paced back and forth the length of the room. Then he stopped before her, put his hand beneath her chin and tilted her face up to his.

"Dot," said he gravely; "you loved the boy; I know you did, little woman. Don't you love him any more?"

Dorothy's face flamed red. Her chin quivered and she tried to turn her head, but he held her facing him mercilessly.

"Jack Holloway!" she flared angrily with a hysterical note in her voice. "How dare you ask me that? What is it to you? You were one of that disgraceful, horrid party, and now you come here to—to torment me——"

She broke down and sobbed frankly into her handkerchief. Holloway took another turn about the room.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "What chance has a man in a case like this?"

Then he stopped before her.

"Dot," he said, "you can think as you like about me. It won't be as bad as I've thought about myself, nor half what I deserve perhaps. I'm not trying to make a case for myself, and whatever you think, I'm going to talk to you like a big brother instead of a sort of thirty-second cousin. You're a chump! Now wait—listen!

"It's Aunt Margaret's fault, I guess, but you've grown prudish and self-opinionated about things of which you know nothing whatever. You've set yourself up as judge and jury over every man on that yacht, condemned them wholesale, and turned down the best fellow of them all——"

"Jack Holloway——!"

"—the best fellow of them all—sent him to the devil, I guess, for no one has heard of him for four years—without a hearing, or a chance to square himself."

She faced him, her fists clenched, her bosom heaving.

"Jack Holloway, you are presuming on old friendship; you are insulting. If that's all you came to say——"

Holloway winced, but his jaw set and a slight smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"It so happens that you've got to hear me, Dorothy. I've made you angry—a good sign that I've been hoping for—and your imperiousness doesn't feeze me a bit. I won't be unpleasant any more, and, for your own sake and Tom's, please listen attentively and patiently.

"When I left him in Honolulu he was in a bad way. He had lost all his money and was going down among the islands for a while. He was all broken up, and I thought it was the money. He didn't tell me he had heard from you, and I never guessed it.

"You're all wrong about him, Dot. He was the one real man of the party. The rest were all that was reported of us—a lot of egregious asses whose idea of fun was a riot, and who deserved all they got—" he suddenly gulped—"all of us, that is, except poor Carson and Charlie Wheeler. We played poker and raised the —— most of the time, and drank all of the time.

"The papers were quite right about there being women and hula dances aboard at Honolulu. That probably hit you the hardest.

"Well, while that was going on Tom and I were over on the island of Hawaii, at the Volcano House, on the edge of the crater of Kilauea. We didn't get to Honolulu till the day the *Hyperion* sailed. That's three words for Tom and one for myself.

"The wreck was terrible! Dorothy, the smashing of that yacht on the reef—the boiling surf—the awful ruthlessness of it—are things that murder my sleep and always will. I know that sounds trite, but you should have seen it——"

"As for Tom, he was the one sane, sober man aboard, and had been since we started. He did everything but humiliate himself to bring the rest to their senses. He would have quit us at Honolulu, but was too game to do it.

"I had half my ribs and an arm broken in the wreck, and it was Tom who dragged me ashore through the surf, or I'd have gone with Carson and Wheeler to the sharks. He helped half a dozen others save their lives till he gave out and the Kanakas pulled him ashore, half-drowned and sobbing like a boy. Now you have the truth, and if you want confirmation I'll get some of the fellows to give it. By George, I'll *make* them do it!"

"But why didn't Tom write and tell me about this? How was I to know after all those reports——"

"Reports, reports! Hang the reports! You've taken them and jumped at conclusions without trying to get at the truth at all. How could Tom explain anything? Is a man going to come to you and tell you *he* was the only good little kitten in the basket? Tom's not a wild Indian, like that San Francisco crowd. He's a man, clear through, good enough for any woman on earth; and if I were you and cared for him at all, I'd hunt him with a fine-tooth comb and square myself——"

"Ahem!" said a dry voice.

Peering at them through a crack in the doorway was a lean, ascetic face with iron-gray hair in disarray.

"Jack Holloway, you young scamp, you've cut my nap short twelve minutes with your loud voice, but I'm glad to see you. I'll be out in a few minutes."

Holloway sprang forward and vigorously shook a thin hand protruding from a flowing kimono sleeve.

"My *dear* Miss Gardiner, I'm delighted to see you. I hope you are well. I was just suggesting to Dorothy that we all go down to the Poodle Dog for supper."

CHAPTER VI

PEARL-SHELL

EFFINGHAM smashed the heavy shell with a rock and sawed at the tough adductor muscles with his knife. Then he tore out the great, quivering mollusc from its beautiful bed of iridescent nacre; and there, adhering to the lower shell, were three large, irregular pearls. They were of the kind known as baroques, and in the body of the oyster was one tiny, round gem, perfect in form and color.

That day, and for many days thereafter, the guano beds were neglected. The new occupation of pearl-diving was taken up with feverish enthusiasm. The sea-floor was fairly paved with the great shell-fish, and the men dived and wrenched at them till their lungs were bursting. They kept at it till they were utterly exhausted and slept like logs, often where they dropped on the open beach.

All took part till the shoal water had been cleared of shell and they were obliged to work more systematically. The boat was rigged with a platform and diving-stones to weight the divers, and the difficult work began of bringing up shell from depths of four fathoms and over.

It was hard and dangerous labor. The strain upon the divers was prodigious; and there were dangers, unseen and terrible, lying below.

From one of these came their first tragedy. Kuma, a Butaritari boy, was rising to the surface, the air in his lungs exhausted, when one of the hideous snake-eels called *puhi-paka* by the natives seized him by the hand with its terrible jaws, armed with row upon row of needle-sharp teeth, dragging his arm into a hole in the reef. Kanakas dread the *puhi* more than they do the shark, but they know how to meet his attack.

No human strength could break the grip of the giant eel, but Kuma waited till the monster relaxed to get a fresh purchase with his tail, then *shoved* with all his strength and tore away his mutilated hand. An instant sooner and the lacerated hand would have been his only injury, but he had burst a blood-vessel, and died that night.

Nevertheless the work went on. Steadily there grew row after row of the great oysters, high up on the beach, there to "rot out" in the sun till the shells could be cleaned of their contents. The bed was a comparatively small one.

In three weeks they had taken the last shell. With a diving-armor it might have been done in as many days, but it covered a very satisfying area of white beach as they laid it out in the sun, and was a thing for these men to gloat over and speculate and dream about.

They lay about when the work was done, nursing salt-water sores and various wounds and bruises. They were a very tired company, but their attitude toward life and each other had changed. They were no longer broken men, delving in the guano for Captain Wiggins; they were men of substance, owners of a bed of shell, the aristocratic holding of the Pacific. They could drop in at any port, show a pocketful of pearls and an air of mystery and be pointed out as men of note. The tainted air from the rotting shell was laden with optimism.

"The question before the house is: "What about Wiggins?" said Matthews.

"Well, *wot* about Wiggins?" growled Welsh. "Wiggins 'asn't any finger in this pie."

"Of course not, Reddy; but you can't convince him of that if he hears what's in the wind. Who'll guarantee he won't hear of it? There may be a fortune there in pearls—and then there may not; but whatever there is, give Wiggins a hint and he'll hog the whole business, to say nothing of the shell."

"Hah!" said Douchet. "Dose shell is nos-*sing!* It's de pearl. I see 'em at T'ursday Island so-o-o beeg! Dey pay, 'ow much you t'ink? Two t'ousand pound —maybe more. De pearl can go in de pocket an' Weegins 'e know nossing about it. De shell—pouf! We sink 'im in de sea!"

The Kanaka boys were in a group by themselves not far away and Effingham nodded toward them significantly.

"There's where the trouble lies," said he. "Those boys are bound to chum with Wiggins' Kanaka crew, and what they tell will be told aft, be sure of that. Then it's good-by pearls!"

Welsh looked at the Kanakas and straightened up. His fingers began to twitch, and gradually a strange expression came over his face. One corner of his mouth drew up, and his little eyes took on an expression of cunning ferocity that could not be mistaken. Effingham laughed outright.

"Oh, come, Reddy," said he; "we're not going to kill off the boys yet awhile. Why, they've done all the hard work! We'll have to organize, that's all. It's a simple matter.

"As for that shell, it's worth two hundred dollars a ton at Shanghai. There may not be more than two cents' worth of pearls in the lot. If there isn't it would be wise, I think, to cache the shell. One might come back some day, you know.

"At any rate, as far as the pearls are concerned, there's no use crossing a bridge till we get to it. Wait till we know what we've got."

"Ah!" said Welsh. "That's the —— of it, mates; this 'ere waitin'. My nerves is all of a shiver. Thank —— we 'ave plenty of gin."

"While we are on the subject," continued Effingham, "I think it would be well if we all agreed to let that shell alone till the final cleaning up. I saw you probing around there, Douchet; and you, too, Cox; and I chased Joey and Keola away this morning. We've got to have some system, and I suggest that the shell be left alone till the final clean-up. Of course you chaps have ideas of your own. I'm only giving you mine, that's all."

"Right!" said Welsh. "And I'll give you mine, mates. We're all gentlemen, with equal rights and privileges, as you may say, and a man as voylates 'em ought to be shot. *I* say, keep away from that shell under penalty of death till the proper time. Just let me get these fins on the man as doesn't!"

CHAPTER VII

PLANS AND RESOLUTIONS

TOM MATTHEWS rolled over on his bed of mats and sat up. Hours before he had aroused from a coma that in no way resembled refreshing sleep, and had since lain awake cursing the abominable odor and nursing his throbbing temples. A "square-face" of gin stood within reach of his hand, and he gulped down a swallow, rose wearily and slipped his bare feet into straw sandals.

It was gray dawn. The trade wind had not yet risen, and the sea rolled lazily at the edge of the barrier reef. No one was stirring on the beach, but as he passed Effingham's tent he heard a hollow, racking cough within. Effingham had been failing fast of late, and his cough had grown steadily worse.

The stoical young Englishman never alluded to himself or his ailment and would have railed at any spoken sympathy, but as Tom looked round the lonely islet, bleaker than ever in the gray of morning, the pathos and tragedy of it struck him like a blow.

"God!" he muttered. "What a place to die in!"

An eighth of a mile away an acre or so of beach was covered with the shell in the process of "rotting out," and the poisonous, festering mass smelled to high heaven. Day and night, unabated by rain or wind, the awful odor hung like a pall—ubiquitous, intolerable—dominating even the snuffy, pungent ammonia smell of the guano. At night the mass emitted a pale, shimmering phosphorescence; by day, under the hot sun, the air above it shuddered in phantasmagoric waves.

Matthews made a détour round the shell and turned inland across a low plateau. There were birds in countless legions. Their crude nests cumbered the ground. They filled the air and dotted the surface of the sea. Huge albatrosses, fierce-eyed and scornful, lumbered grudgingly out of his way. Somber frigate-birds, with crimson pouches at their throats, hissed and snapped at him truculently, while clouds of gulls and smaller birds took protesting flight, to settle again as he passed.

He reached the windward side of the island and threw himself at full length on a rocky eminence overlooking the sea. To-morrow they would clean the shell, and he had found the strain of waiting almost unbearable. Filled with new resolutions, he burned with impatience to put them into practise. He was going to reestablish his manhood—to think of himself once more by the ambiguous word "gentleman" without flinching.

He was young and there was still a chance. All things were possible if he quit drinking and took a grip on himself. He longed for cut glass and silver, fine linen, the society of well-dressed men and women—to be in touch with his kind again on equal terms; but these things were conditional on there being valuable pearls in the shell, and the uncertainty had keyed his overwrought nerves to the breaking point.

What lay hidden in the corruption of the pearl-shell was problematical. Divided among them all it might mean no more than a trifle for each. However small his share, Tom intended to put it to good use, and, if he could not have at once those things that represented the amenities of life, he would find a way to them eventually.

He had brooded too long over a woman who had thrown him over unfairly. He would never forget her—her memory would always be a scar—but he would make a fresh start in spite of it. He had quite recovered from the feeling of loneliness with which he had been stricken after having impulsively flung away the locket, and rejoiced to be free from that last link which bound him with the past.

Regarding the pearls Tom found plenty of cause for uneasiness. He reviewed the individual traits of his companions, their strained attitude toward each other and the smoldering hostility and distrust that had grown through being so long together in this lonely place.

Four of the men were either actual or potential criminals. Effingham, though Tom instinctively trusted him, was an enigma for all that; and his sinister and pessimistic allusions whenever the pearls were mentioned, coming as they did from a dying man, were disturbing. It seemed inevitable that, if many pearls were found, trouble would follow in so mixed and uncongenial a company.

Uneasy and depressed, Tom walked slowly back across the island. No one was at work on the guano beds. The Kanakas were off fishing on the reef, and the white men were sitting about on the beach or wandering nervously around the vicinity of the shell.

In spite of their compact the temptation to probe at the oysters, fast growing leathery and shriveled in the sun, was almost irresistible. The square-face was passing freely. Even Welsh, the stolid giant, was visibly nervous.

"My word!" said he, wiping his mouth with a huge paw. "I wish that stinkin' mess was cleaned up. Suppose a ship should 'appen in now, with all that shell laid out. It would be cruel 'ard to be stuck up for all that swag, mates!"

Effingham winked at Tom.

"Listen to the lion roar!" said he. "Reddy the Bushranger afraid of being held up! How about you, Frenchy?"

Douchet looked at the shell and ground his teeth wickedly.

"*Sacré!*" said he. "Suppose she come now, for dose pearl I would cut ze 'eart from h'every man on ze sheep!"

"Spoken like a little man," said Effingham. "No lack of spirit in Frenchy here. I should like to see a man's heart cut out. It must be curious."

"There's no need to borrow that kind of trouble," said Tom. "We haven't seen a sail in three months, and there's none coming. We're too far off the track."

"Don't be too sure, my son."

Effingham rolled a cigaret with a quick, deft twist of finger and thumb.

"Things usually happen at the wrong time. Pearls, especially looted ones like these, smell of trouble as sure as they smell of rotten oysters. Pass the gin, Tommie!"

Davison yawned loudly.

"Here comes Keola with a bag of mullet," said he; "and Joey's got some crawfish. Good chuck in sight, boys. Let's have a small game to work up an appetite."

They gathered in the *lanai* and began a rather desultory game of poker. Long association had made each man's style of play familiar to the others. Cox was cautious and timid, uncertain of a good hand unless stimulated by drink; Davison rather stolid and consistent for so mercurial a game as poker. He played a far better game of whist. Welsh was blunderingly aggressive, with strong oaths when luck went against him.

Douchet, throughout a game, sat tense and nervous, plucking at his pointed black beard, his mean little close-set eyes alight with avarice. He snatched at his winnings greedily, and it was understood that he would cheat when possible.

Effingham, by far the best player, seemed indifferent to the game and unruffled by winnings or losses; but his slim fingers manipulated the cards with the skill of a born gambler, and he invariably won at any game they chose to play.

Tom played the fair, average game of most Americans when the game is draw poker, but it had long ceased to interest him. He was weary of the greed of Welsh and Douchet, the babbled obscenities of Davison and Cox's eternal grin and whining voice. Yet he played when the others did, for the game was a relief from mental stagnation.

It lacked intrinsic interest, for there was nothing to play for. They had staked their prospective pay from Wiggins so often, borrowing and reborrowing, that it had grown into a hopeless jumble of accounts that no one attempted to straighten out.

They now played for chips made of the

limbs of trees of different-colored woods sawed into thin discs. These had a purely chimerical value of twenty-five cents, fifty cents and a dollar each, according to color, the values being represented by sandalwood, *hau* and *kou* woods, respectively.

They played till meal-time. The game dragged, but they were all in good humor, and for the time they warmed toward each other and expanded into something like geniality. It struck Matthews with a glow of surprize and made him rather ashamed of his uneasy suspicions.

From their present attitude one would have thought them the best comrades in the world. They were all, in fact, building air-castles with foundations of pearls.

After the meal they resumed the game by the light of smoky lanterns, but presently Welsh threw down his hand.

"Blow the cards!" said he. "Let's chuck it! We've a bigger gamble out there on the beach than we'll ever get out of these greasy old palammers. Me mind ain't on 'em. It's on a pub in Sydney where the fighters drop in now and then. I've a fancy to buy it and tryne fighters meself and be genteel in a top-'at. I've always wanted to own a pub."

"I'm for the Poodle Dog in San Francisco," said Matthews. "I'm going to order a canvas-back with sauce made from the juice of the carcass; a planked venison steak, some artichokes, a ripe old Camembert and a bottle of their special Burgundy. After that I don't care whether school keeps or not."

Cox was for going into trade. He knew of a fine schooner, seized for debt, that was fairly rotting at the dock in Auckland, and could be bought dirt cheap. Davison was going "home" with the sole idea of disgracing the father who had turned him off with a pittance to shift for himself in the colonies. First, however, he was going to have a bit of a turn-up with some old cronies at Joe Anderson's in Suva.

"Me, I go to Rouen," said Douchet. "Da's ze place where I am betr-r-ray' an' sent to Noumea, ze private —— of ze French government. I been in dat —— t'ree years. I find dat woman who betr-r-ray me an' send me dere, if she is live. She is my wife. Wit' dese two 'ands I keel her den. I tak' 'er by de t'roat, so, an' I keel her!"

Effingham laughed.

"You fellows talk like a lot of bloated millionaires," said he, "when for all we know there's about twenty dollars' worth of crooked little pearls out there to buy pubs and schooners with. There may be no more than one of Tommie's square meals all round. Go ahead with your fairy tales; I'm going to turn in."

He rolled over in the corner and went to sleep.

None of the others slept, however. Talk languished; they took frequent nips at the bottle, and the air was heavy with tobacco-smoke. Sometimes a man drowsed, particularly the corpulent Davison, only to start awake with a jerk.

Tom felt unusually wakeful himself; but he could not understand these men deliberately fighting sleep until he became aware of a slyness and stealthiness in the way they were eying and appraising one another. He himself was under this uncomfortable scrutiny as well as Effingham, quietly sleeping in a corner of the *lanai*. Then he understood.

"Why," he muttered, "the beasts are each afraid the others are going to get ahead of him."

He rose in disgust and went to his tent to sleep till morning.

CHAPTER VIII

DOROTHY HAS A VISITOR

FOR the first time Dorothy's Aunt Margaret had cause to complain of neglect on the part of her niece. There were times when she found Dorothy positively unsympathetic, and the good lady's matutinal recitals of her "symptoms" of the night before were received with actual indifference. Dorothy was distraught, and little worry lines began to appear around her eyes and mouth.

Jack Holloway came often and they spent much time in close communion. Shortly after his first visit a notice had appeared in various California papers offering a reward for information concerning the whereabouts of Matthews, and later, at Holloway's suggestion, in the journals of Australia and the Far East.

Dorothy scanned her daily mail eagerly and hopefully till a couple of months had gone by without result. She admitted that it was an impertinence for her to try to communicate with Matthews, and really believed she was acting purely from motives of justice.

It was hardly probable that he would ever care to see her again after her scathing letter of four years before, every word of which was burned in her memory, and if he had suddenly appeared before her she would have been at a loss to explain her recrudescent interest in his welfare; but she was acting on Holloway's suggestion to communicate with Tom, if possible, and "square herself" for her conscience's sake.

If he were living he would have ordered his life anew on other lines. There would be other women, one of whom had perhaps made him happy—other scenes and other interests.

She was prompted, she believed, solely by the desire to acknowledge her fault in having misjudged him, in the same spirit in which Holloway had come to her with his story. She wondered if he would scorn her; or if he would be kind and look at her, a little reproachfully perhaps, with his honest, sentimental gray eyes, as he used to do, and—and——

Here Dorothy would become very wretched indeed, and she and Holloway would drag her aunt, protesting, to the theater and a late supper, where the older lady would have a most enjoyable time in spite of herself and forget all about clinical thermometers and "symptoms" for the time being.

"Auntie," said Dorothy one morning at breakfast, "I know the very best thing in the world for you. Dr. Snyder spoke of it the other day, and I've been thinking it over ever since. It's a sea voyage. There's a steamer leaving tomorrow for Honolulu, and we have plenty of time to pack and make the arrangements. Won't that be delightful?"

"Child!" cried Miss Gardiner, startled. "It's impossible! I'm too ill to travel. Why, I should be seasick! It would be the death of me! The last time we went to Europe——"

"Ah, but this isn't Europe, auntie. Honolulu is the loveliest place in the world, and the Pacific is very quiet. It will cure you, I'm sure."

"Impossible! I can't think of it, Dorothy. Why——"

"You *must* think of it, auntie, I'm afraid. You see, I took the doctor's word that it will be the very best thing for you, and bought the tickets."

She smiled sweetly and patted her aunt's cheek as she rose from the table.

"Don't be fussy, auntie dear. Think of the palms and the sunshine and the flying-fish and—and things. I'm going to pack."

THREE weeks later Dorothy was sitting on the veranda of a cottage at Waikiki when a hack drove up and deposited at the gate a short, stocky, weather-beaten man with a grizzled beard. He took a paper from his pocket and unfolded it as he walked toward the veranda. He looked doubtfully at Dorothy.

"I came about this notice, ma'am," said he. "Is the gentleman here who put it in the paper?"

He indicated a personal notice identical with the one Matthews had seen in a Sydney paper on the *Mamaloa*, save that the address given was that of the Waikiki cottage.

"I put it in myself," said Dorothy. "Come in and sit down, please. I am Miss Gardiner."

The stocky man touched his cap and bowed.

"Captain Wiggins, ma'am, at your service. I thought I might 'ave news for you. 'As any one else been 'ere about it?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, there has been no one else so far," replied Dorothy.

Captain Wiggins, with a sigh of relief, settled his bulk in a wicker chair and mopped his forehead with a bandanna handkerchief.

"It says 'ere, miss, that there is a reward—a 'undred dollars, it says—for information about a man named Thomas Matthews. Now I know a man of that name and I thought that ma'ap 'e's the same."

Dorothy bent forward eagerly.

"Was he one of the guests on the *Hyperion?*"

"I can't say as to that, miss. Like enough. I 'eard of the *'Yperion* wreck a few years ago at Apia, but I never knew Matthews to speak of it. Was 'e a kind of a down-and-out sort of a chap—a great 'and for the gin—kind of a beach-comber, like?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Dorothy, her heart sinking. "Not that kind of a man at all. Mr. Matthews is a gentleman."

"Oh, as to that, 'e's a gentleman, right enough. Quite the toff, you might say, only down on 'is luck. 'Ails from Boston way—'Arvard College, and all that; well eddicated. I've 'eard 'im speak of it. A fine, upstanding young man when sober, only in a bad way financially, as I said. Tall man, clean shaved, with a mole on 'is right cheek—and there you 'ave 'im, miss."

Dorothy's pulse was racing now.

"It may be the same Mr. Matthews," she said guardedly, endeavoring to control her voice. "Where is he now?"

" 'E's on an island, miss; a long way from 'ere. A pretty forsaken spot, as you may say. 'E's in my employ just at present."

"But where is this island? How does one get there? Do the steamers stop?"

Wiggins indulged in the ghost of a grin.

" 'Ardly that as yet, miss. The only steamer as 'as been there that I know of is a British cruiser. The island's only just charted, and it's out of the run of traffic. I 'ave 'ere—" he took a slip of paper from his pocket, unfolded it and held it, looking somewhat embarrassed, yet with a crafty gleam in his eyes—"the latitude and longitude of the place. I thought of giving it to you, if this was your Mr. Matthews, when we 'ad settled—ahem!——"

"Oh, the reward, to be sure!"

Dorothy had seen and understood the gleam in the captain's eye.

"Well, Captain Wiggins, some of your description might fit the Mr. Matthews that I am inquiring for, but it might fit many other men, too. Even if he is the same, how am I to verify it? You are a total stranger to me——"

"As to that, miss, there's my mate and the crew of my schooner. They'll stand ready to back me up. They all know Matthews, drunk or sober."

Dorothy rose and stood leaning against the veranda rail, tapping the floor with her foot.

"I think I shall go with you to your schooner, if you will take me in your carriage. I should like to have your mate and crew verify your description, and I can stop at the bank and get the money for you on the way. Please wait till I get my hat."

They drove to town and then to the wharf, Dorothy stopping on the way and drawing from the bank a large sum of money in gold. In the cabin of the *Mamaloa* the mate was in the midst of a recital confirming the captain's description of Matthews, when Wiggins suddenly struck his forehead a violent blow with his knuckles.

"God bless me!" he cried. "What an ass I am; I had clean forgot! Just a moment, miss!"

He disappeared into his own room, returning presently with a small, clear snapshot photograph. It was one taken by Effingham on the way to the island. It showed a group of six men, one of them Captain Wiggins; another, barefooted, in worn pajamas, whom Dorothy recognized at once as Tom Matthews.

She looked at the picture long and earnestly. In the pitiless fashion of snap-shot photographs it accentuated the haggard, careworn expression and dissipated lines in the faces of the subjects. Except for the stolid Wiggins, sternly posing on his own quarter-deck, the photo showed unsparingly a rakish, tatterdemalion group of nondescripts in which Matthews himself appeared without advantage.

Dorothy laid the picture down with a sigh. Then she opened her hand-bag and dumped the contents on the table. From the shining heap of gold she counted out ten ten-dollar pieces and gave them to the captain.

"Thank you!" she said. "I am quite satisfied."

Leaving the rest of the gold lying before her, she fell to studying the photograph again. The heap of gold remaining on the table was of a size to make Captain Wiggins lick his lips. He was looking at it as a cat might eye a cream-jug when Dorothy raised her eyes.

"Captain," she asked, "do you ever carry passengers?"

"No, ma'am," said Wiggins promptly. "Only down among the islands, that is—not regular passengers. The *Mamaloa's* an old roach-trap and don't smell any too sweet, as you may 'ave noticed. Passengers are that fastidious!"

Dorothy slowly dropped the gold-pieces, a few at a time, into her bag.

"I didn't know, of course; I thought I'd ask you. I thought you might—for a consideration."

She rose to go.

"Wait a moment, miss," said Wiggins; "I'm going to 'ave the cook serve some tea."

A HALF an hour later Dorothy walked up-town toward a carriage stand. Her eyes were shining and her face was flushed with excitement.

"Dorothy Gardiner," she murmured, "you're a goose! You might have written. It would have answered the purpose; and, oh, dear, what will Aunt Margaret say! She'll think you have gone stark, staring mad!"

CHAPTER IX

CUSTODIAN OF THE PEARLS

"MY EYE!" said Welsh in an awestruck voice. "Wot a 'aul! Mates, I dont know 'ow you feel about it, but *I'm* goin' to get drunk!"

Douchet's nostrils were wide and his eyes like two live coals.

"*Pardieu!*" he rumbled. "We are r-reech!"

Cox's smile grew more lickerish than ever, and Davison stared incredulously, repeating: "My word! My word!" over and over again, while the Kanaka boys hovered about the group, wide-eyed and curious.

The pearls lay before them in a brown calabash, a heap of beautiful gems, far finer than they had dared anticipate. The uncertainty of the pearl-fisher's trade makes it one of the most fascinating in the world. Aside from the valuable shell itself every oyster represents a potential fortune.

In a whole bed there may not be one pearl of value; in another may lie hidden a king's ransom. Seldom is there a cleaning-up without one of the extremes of disappointment or rejoicing.

None of the men was expert in the delicate business of judging pearl-values, but the size and beauty of some of these spoke eloquently for themselves. There were four, indeed, of a bigness and luster beyond any they had ever seen. But there were many others, for the bed had proved of incredible richness, and they ranged from the four in a graduated scale down to a scant handful of irregular baroques.

Tom gazed with fascination at the softly glowing heap in the calabash. His chance for rehabilitation lay before him, and the blood surged faster through his pulses. The past seemed to fall away from him and the future to rise and welcome him, so that his dominant feeling was a longing for action of some kind to try out his dormant muscles and stir the kinks out of his brain. Psychologically it was the same sensation that prompted Welsh's desire to get drunk.

Effingham fingered the gems coolly enough; but his eyes had an unwonted brightness, and there was a glowing, hectic spot on each cheek.

"Emblems of trouble," said he prophetically. "I'm almost sorry there are so many. If we weren't such a mild-mannered, gentle flock of lambs there might be some throat-cutting over these. Now that we've got 'em and the suspense is over, what are we going to do with 'em?"

"W'y, divide 'em," said Welsh; "each man his share, and share and share alike. That's right and proper among gentlemen, I take it."

"All agreed on that?" asked Effingham, looking around.

They nodded.

"Very well. How are you going to do it? Who's going to set a value on them? We're none of us pearl-buyers, and some one's bound to get the worst of it, let alone coming to blows over the division. Every one of you has his eye on some particular one right now and is ready to scramble for it to prevent some one else getting hold of it.

"Ha, I thought so! That shot went home. Douchet, don't look so sheepish!"

He smiled satirically—

"Hadn't we better talk it over?"

"Oh, rot!" said Cox. "We're all gentlemen here, as Reddy says. Why not bury them till Wiggins gets back?"

Effingham looked at him with a sudden, contemptuous fierceness.

"There's no need of any delusions about our all being gentlemen and men of honor. The fact is we're a crew of pretty hard characters. If we bury these every one will want to know where, naturally. Then what's to hinder any one of us privately digging them up and planting them somewhere else? No, there's only one thing to be done.

"These pearls, as they stand, represent money—a lump sum. Money can be evenly divided; these can not. Let the man who holds the balance of trust take charge of them till they can be disposed of and an equal division made of the money they bring. Otherwise there's going to be a lot of dissension, and that means—trouble!"

"Good idea, that," said Davison. "We'll draw cuts for it."

"That won't do, boys," said Effingham

emphatically. "I said the man who holds the balance of trust. We can't leave that to chance. We must vote for it."

This led to a prolonged and heated discussion. It was quite evident that with the exception of Effingham none of the party cared to see the pearls in the hands of any one but himself.

"If we put them in the hands of one man, as you say," said Cox, "what's to hinder *him* from burying them on his own account? Fat chance the rest of us would have then."

"I spoke of one man digging them up and transplanting them in case we buried them together. We might never find out who did it. In this case we know the man beforehand, and if at any time he failed to produce the pearls on demand—well, I guess we'd know what to do. Our treasurer will walk with his life in his hands, gentlemen!"

To Matthews the arrangement seemed the fairest possible, and he joined his arguments to Effingham's. After some further wrangling the plan was agreed upon. They wrote their votes on the margin of a leaf from an old paper novel and tossed them into the calabash; but the result of the first ballot was ludicrous. Tom and Effingham had each voted for the other; the rest had all voted for themselves. Matthews laughed in spite of the gravity of the occasion.

"Vote's a tie," said he. "Come again, gentlemen!"

"One moment," said Effingham mildly, almost pleadingly. "Don't think I want to do all of the talking, but I do want one word before we vote again. Of course this will be easily settled in the long run. The only idea is to keep the pearls together in safe hands, so there will be no jawing and rowing over them.

"The only way is to have the most capable man in charge. He has got to keep a clear head and be ready to fight some discontented idiot at any time to protect his trust. Any one of us can put up a fight, I guess; and any one of us can let the gin alone—" he looked hard at Cox and Davison—"but my candidate is Tom Matthews because he can do both as well as any of us and, being a sort of new chum on the beach, is probably a little more trustworthy than the rest of us. That's all."

This time there were two votes for Tom against one for every one but Cox. The irresolute and timid member had dodged the responsibility in favor of Tom. There was a snarl from Douchet and a curse from Welsh as the result was announced, and Cox cringed a trifle, looking dubious as if he half-regretted his choice. But there was no further demonstration, though as Tom made the pearls into a temporary packet he was watched hungrily by several pairs of eyes, and a little thrill ran up and down his spine.

He had anticipated trouble, and now if it came he would be the storm-center; but the sense of responsibility fired him with new self-confidence and determination. It was, he felt, the first move in his rehabilitation. It satisfied in a measure his craving for action. With the feel of the pearls against his skin the world seemed once more a very good one to live in, and with a light heart he set about making an oilskin pouch for the gems.

THEY gathered in the *lanai* to celebrate the holiday in the proper spirit. It was the first day since their arrival that they actually shirked work, but all thought of labor was put aside. They were bursting with animal spirits. They ransacked their supplies for the few luxuries in store.

They shot plover on the reef, and the Kanakas gathered fish, *ti*-root and plantains, which they cooked in an *imu*, underground. Davison resurrected the guitar and concertina and extracted weird melody unreproached. And, having feasted, they lay about at ease.

"—— love us!" said Welsh, leaning back luxuriously and puffing at a black, moldy Manila cigar. "But it's good to be rich and tyke it h'easy after sweatin' the way we 'ave for a few shillin's from that bloke Wiggins. No more o' that for me!"

"I feel the same, Reddy," said Tom, busily stitching at his pouch, "but it seems to me we oughtn't to quit. In the first place we'll rot for want of something to do; and in the second, if we haven't a cargo for the old man he may suspect something and turn rusty."

"If he does," said Davison, plucking languidly at the guitar, "he can jolly well go to the —— for all of me."

"That's all well enough," said Tom; "but we want a passage somewhere, and the only way to get it is to keep on the right side of the old man."

"What we care for dat?" said Douchet with heat. "If dat leetle peeg mak' troub' we tak' away his schooner—w'at? We leave Weegins wid de birds or, maybe, cut 'is t'roat!"

"Oh, we're not a pack of bloody pirates," said Cox. "What we want is to get safely away with the pearls. Still, we've earned a good loaf. Why not keep the Kanakas at the guano? They can finish the job in a couple of weeks."

"That wouldn't be fair to the boys," replied Matthews. "They've worked hard and faithfully, and they're trusting us now, like a lot of children, for a share in the pearls. What do you think, Walt?"

He turned to Effingham, who was leaving for his tent.

"To tell the truth, Tommie," said he lazily, "I don't give a hang one way or the other. Good night!"

Tom emptied the pearls into the completed pouch and hung it round his neck by a strand of coconut fibre.

"Well," said he, "I admit I'm rather keen for a spell of loafing, myself. It's understood then that we've thrown up Wiggins' job?"

No one answered. Four pairs of eyes were focused on the pouch hanging from his neck. While none of those eyes, red and watery from drink, held any actual hostility toward himself, they had a common expression of avarice, and in that glance he read the full responsibility of his stewardship. It weighed heavily on him, and he passed a restless night.

Once or twice he fancied he heard whispering outside his tent, and on one occasion he rose and peered out. The last quarter of the old moon was near the horizon, and by its light he saw near by a dark figure. Approaching, he found it was Joey, seated on the ground, a rifle across his knees.

"Why, Joey," said he, "what are you doing here?"

"Epihama (Effingham) speak me come," replied Joey simply.

Tom retired without questioning the boy further, but the incident gave him fresh food for reflection. Why had Effingham done this without consulting him? Was this a guard-over him? Or was Effingham, too, suspicious?

The next morning he walked over to the windward side of the island to be alone and think the situation over. His trusteeship was beginning to be onerous. Why this greed and distrust? That he would fail to render a just accounting was absurd; his pride fairly bristled at the thought.

Effingham had forced the thing on him with that ridiculous election, and then set a watch on him! The man valued him no more than he did the rest, and the whole pother was over a few trinkets of no more value at the moment than so many pebbles.

He opened the pouch and looked at the pearls. Ah, but they were beautiful—as beautiful as imprisoned moonlight! Playthings for elves and fairies—and Douchet's talons and Welsh's hairy paws would snatch at them to squander in nameless debaucheries! It seemed a pity—almost a sacrilege!

Could he— Tom hastily closed the pouch and hung it round his neck.

"A little more of this," he muttered, "and I shall be as bad as the rest!"

As he rose to leave he saw a man slip from behind a knoll fifty yards away and go sliding back under cover like some little jungle creature. It was Douchet!

When he arrived at the *lanai* a card game was just beginning, and he took a hand. After an hour or so of play Effingham, who appeared quite ill, had a severe coughing spell and wandered away. The rest maintained the festival air of the day before.

Though it was early forenoon they were all in various stages of drunkenness, and their plans for spending their wealth soared into the wildest realms of fancy. They were boisterous and boastful of shocking episodes of the past, and laughed immoderately at each others' stories.

Tom noticed, however, that none of the conversation was addressed to him. When he spoke they listened in silence till he had done, as if there had grown a wall of formality between them. All his uneasiness crystallized into a feeling of bitter indignation and disgust, and he threw down his hand and went in search of Effingham.

CHAPTER X

TOLD IN CONFIDENCE

HE FOUND him in a little clearing close to where a small spring bubbled up among the stones. Inland the low trees shut out the nesting birds and the barren bleakness of the rest of the island, while seaward the dwarf mimosa hid the beach, and the nearest view of the sea was the surf breaking on the distant margin of the reef, seen through the swaying trunks of the palms. It was a favorite spot of Effingham's when he wished to be alone after a spell of illness.

He was mending a tear in the knee of a pair of duck trousers by drawing and inserting threads. He had a scrupulous neatness and refinement of person and an almost miraculous dexterity in the use of his long, slim hands. He could do interesting and mysterious things with cards, coins and bits of string, make perfect splices with rope, and bring down a drinking coconut by severing the stem with a single cast of a sharp stone or a shot from his revolver. In whatever he did there was the same finished precision and accuracy.

When completed, the delicate darning he was employed with could not be told from the original fabric. He was whistling through his teeth as unconcernedly as if pearls were the last thing in the world.

Tom threw himself down beside him.

"Walt," said he, "you were right about these —— things. I smell trouble!"

Effingham took a tiny pair of scissors from the hussif by his side, delicately snipped the cloth on his knee and pulled the thread.

"Shouldn't wonder," said he; "I suppose the jail-birds are a little unwholesome by now."

They could hear laughter and hoarse snatches of song from the beach, and presently there rose above the other sounds a clear, strong, bell-like voice:

"Eternal Father! Strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea!"

Heard from a distance, with the fat, sodden face of the singer hidden, the stately hymn sounded dignified and really beautiful. Then Davison's voice trailed off into "Tom Bowling" and finally to some obscene verses of the Siva dance, at which there was a patting of hands keeping time, and more laughter.

"The voice of an angel and the soul of a swine," said Effingham. "We're a pretty hard lot, Tommie. How do you feel about holding office as treasurer?"

"Shaky," replied Tom. "The beasts are dissatisfied, and there's bound to be a ruction sooner or later. I believe the safest way is to bury the things."

"Don't do it! They're going to want to see them every hour or so to make sure you have them safe and to finger them over. I wouldn't bury them if I were you."

Tom plucked viciously at a tuft of grass and flung it from him with a curse.

"By gracious, it makes me sick! Here we're all ready to fly at each other's throats over a lot of baubles from sick oysters. —— the brutes! What the —— did you saddle this on to me for, Walt?"

Effingham laid aside the completed garment, lazily rolled a cigaret and threw himself back at full length.

"Don't be an ass, Tommie! There are a dozen reasons. I'll give you just a few. For one, you are head and shoulders above that part of the gang—that's understood. If there had been any attempt at a division of the pearls we would have begun murdering each other at once for the other man's share; not at your initiative or mine, but we would have had to take part for self-protection. I don't believe you quite understand yet, Tommie, the innate villainy in a gang of this sort.

"If either Welsh or Frenchy had charge of the pearls you'd never see one of them again; and they would cut the throats of Cox or Davison if either of those weak brethren were in charge, without turning a hair. I'd have assumed the responsibility myself, but there are times when I'm pretty helpless, Tommie—coughs and hemorrhages you know—and couldn't hold my own in a scrap, when, as it is, I'm standing back of you in any trouble that comes along."

"I suppose," said Tom with a touch of bitterness, "that one of the ways to do that is to stick Joey outside my tent with a gun. I've been trying to get to the wherefore of that all morning."

Effingham made no reply. Instead he deliberately rolled a cigaret and handed the bag of tobacco to Tom. As Tom held out his hand to receive it something else, round and hard and shiny, fell into his palm. He dropped the tobacco and stared, for the thing he held was the locket he had thrown away so recklessly over a fortnight before. Effingham gave the short, dry chuckle that, with him, passed for laughter.

"Your property, I believe, Tommie. Pardon me for changing the subject."

"Yes, it's mine! But how on earth—where did you get it?"

"Joey found it. He's a good lad, Joey. He brought it to me, and I had an idea it was yours. Joey wasn't sure, because your description of it never got home. He thought you had lost a ten-dollar piece."

He sat up suddenly.

"Now, Tommie, another thing! I take it that your share in these pearls means a whole lot to you—more than a splurge at Honolulu or San Francisco and then knocking around this forsaken part of the universe the rest of your life?"

"Of course. I mean to get square with myself if I can. I owe myself that much, and this ought to be a start in the right direction."

"I know—I know! And there's usually some reason why a decent white man hits the beach in the first place. Sometimes it's booze, and then again it isn't. You see, Tommie," he continued, dreamily gazing off into space, "the game is pretty nearly up with me. My interest isn't exactly in the pearls, for not one of them will ever be of any use to me."

Tom felt a warm wave of sympathy.

"Don't! Don't say that, old chap——"

Effingham waved his cigaret lightly.

"The bell's rung for the curtain; no use talking about it," said he. "Go on, Tommie, if you care to."

It was the first time he had ever put aside his careless, half-mocking air either to give or ask a confidence. He was looking up at the sky with his usual impersonal expression, but Tom saw that there was a touch of melancholy in the thin, sallow face, and something welled up within him. It was a new respect and liking, a feeling of brotherhood and kinship for the doomed man; and with it, too, a longing for the confidence and support of the latent spiritual strength in the wasting body.

He did not understand Effingham and the psychic quality of his almost uncanny intuition and unerring judgment, nor did he comprehend the dauntless spirit that would condescend to no weakness, nor brook any man's sympathy. He did, however, appreciate the tragic pathos of Effingham's condition and his inevitable fate being worked out on this desolate island. He felt the man's magnetism, and choked with unspoken sympathy. He told finally without reserve of the Girl, the disastrous cruise of the *Hyperion*, and his plans and resolutions.

Effingham listened thoughtfully, smoking an endless chain of cigarets.

"Why don't you go to her when you've got straightened out and tell her the truth about it?" he asked when Tom had finished.

"Why should I?" said Tom bitterly. "She never gave me a chance in the first place, and she wouldn't believe me now. No, that's over and done with. I've got to make a fresh start, live down this four years of rotten worthlessness, and in time I'll forget the whole business."

"You're a pretty good fellow, Tommie, if I do say it to your face. Get the gin out of your system, some decent clothes, and decent people round you and you'll be a better man; and remember one axiom—the only thing a woman worth while won't tolerate in a man is weakness. I don't mean weakness from our point of view like, say, drunkenness. I mean a falling below her standard, whatever it happens to be. Give me a light!"

He lit a fresh cigaret.

"It's been good of you to tell me all this, and I'll tell you a yarn to explain what I mean. It will take but a few minutes There was once a man I knew who came from pretty good stock—his father was a peer of England—and he was trained in most of the accomplishments that go to make up what we call a gentleman. He was a fairly decent fellow, with some strength of character—misdirected, it is true, on account of his environment. Among a great many others he had one serious fault—he was rather frail of physique.

"As he had something more than ordinary skill in various ways to make up for it, and a tolerably well-ordered brain, this did not occur to him as a fault till a certain period in his life. He was a younger son, this man, very wild and a spendthrift, quite unlike his stolid, beefy older brothers, and in the natural course of events he finally found himself in Shanghai drawing a quarterly remittance from home.

"He was, I will not say superior to, but different from, the thousands of his kind who loaf about the clubs and saloons. In a few years he was making a great deal of money and was besides something of a social factor and a man of importance.

"Then he married. She was the daughter of an English army officer, a member of the gayer social set, and it is likely that he dazzled her at first when they were married, for she was an admirer of the rugged, athletic type of man.

"That was her standard, and this frail chap would not ordinarily have appealed to her. As for him, it is enough to say that he worshiped her and was blind to a number of faults and indiscretions.

"Well, to cut it short, there came a schooner-yacht into port. The captain and owner was a great, handsome brute of a creature, full of masculine magnetism, and about as thorough-paced a scoundrel as ever walked a deck. His record became public afterward. He entertained lavishly aboard, and there were always card games and women in evidence. The fellow became a kind of fad with a certain element, and the man I'm telling you of often visited aboard with his wife.

"One night he was one of a party selected for the cheap form of swindle by which the yachtsman lived, and after the drinks had circulated freely a round of cold hands was dealt for the purpose of fleecing the guests. The frail man—who knew all about manipulating cards—detected the thing at once and exposed it on the spot.

"Now there are two things that belong with the story. One is that the man had developed something the matter with his lungs and was more frail than ever; and the other that his wife had often been aboard the yacht alone, ostensibly as a guest of the women. It is well to remember, too, that the man had seen a good many of the high ideals he had clung to toppled over. A man is not as exacting in the matter of standards as a woman.

"There was an uproar in the yacht's cabin. The yachtsman owned to the attempted swindle, but he proceeded to beat the frail man, who had no weapons fit to defend himself with, to within an inch of his life, so that he was carried ashore insensible. The next morning the yacht was gone and the man's wife with it.

"Now this chap wasn't one who would try to hold a woman against her will, nor set any obstacle in her way if she loved another man who cared for her and did the fair thing, but a year later he got a letter from her from Melbourne where she had been deserted. Before he could get help to her she starved to death. That's all. It's a pretty sordid story."

Effingham sat up and threw away his cigaret-stub. He had told the story without a trace of emotion.

"Br-r-rgh! I'm as shaky as a leaf. If I don't take a few drinks I shall have a coughing fit."

"But what did you—what did the man do?" asked Tom.

"Nothing much. Things dropped away from him, so to speak. He had cared for her enough to wish for her happiness at the expense of his own. Afterward he hunted the other man over a deal of blue water and dry land till his business went to pot and his money was gone.

"Now, Tommie, to change the subject, this election as treasurer and guardian of the pearls isn't going to stand. They won't have it, and I only suggested it in the first place as a respite till something better turned up, so we can look for that trouble you've been anticipating right soon. Hello, I shouldn't wonder if this is it!"

CHAPTER XI

A FRIENDLY GAME

A LITTLE group was approaching, led by Welsh and Douchet. Behind came the two remittance-men, their arms lovingly twined about each other's necks. In one hand Cox brandished a half-emptied gin-bottle. Douchet's small, white teeth were bared in a coyote-like snarl.

Welsh's eyes were bloodshot and his face flushed a deep red. He beamed boozily upon Tom and Effingham with an expansive grin that was meant to appear affable; but there was a furtive, self-conscious air about the big man that was perfectly transparent.

"Mate," said he to Tom as they seated themselves, "we've 'ad a bit of a cornference about these votes yesterday and wants to talk it over. No 'ard feelin's, o' course. Suppose we all 'as a drink first."

Cox passed the bottle, which was soon emptied.

"Well," said Tom, outwardly calm. "What is it?"

"W'y," said Welsh, licking his lips, "it seems like a bit too much to arsk of one man to tyke charge of all them pearls. Too much responsibility, like."

"Yas!" said Douchet. "Dose pearls don' belong one man. Dey belong us h'all. I like mine in my 'ands so I can feel 'em de 'ole tam. Da's me!"

" 'Old on, Frenchy, none o' your cuttin' in! You see, Matthews," Welsh continued argumentatively, "it's —— to sit tight 'ere till Wiggins comes with nothin' to do but shovel guano into bags when we all 'ave money as good as in the bank. We fidges an' fusses an' no one 'arf satisfied, 'less it's you that 'as the swag.

"W'y not 'ave a bit o' fun to parse the time? ' 'Ow?' says you. W'y, divvy up the pearls. We don't care if there is a mistyke of a few pounds in the long run. We'll leave the division to you, so being you're treasurer, if you like, an' no questions arsked. Then we can 'ave a friendly turn-up with the cards that'll liven things up on this forsaken roost."

Tom looked from face to face and saw no sympathy. All were looking at him expectantly, waiting in suspense for his reply.

"There's no earthly use my telling you you're a pack of fools," said he. "Suppose that I refuse to give them up?"

Welsh looked everywhere but at the speaker as if embarrassed.

"W'y," said he softly, "then there'll be just that many more for the rest of us."

Tom grew red to the ears, then a cold rage came over him. He rose to his feet, struggling for self-control, and when he spoke his voice was low and even.

"You blackguard! You bushranging thief! You dare threaten me? Get up on your feet; I'm going to fight you!"

Welsh looked up, an expression of almost ludicrous astonishment on his face, then got slowly to his feet. He was a formidable creature. His low, sloping forehead was muscled over the heavy red brows like the Farnese Hercules, and his great shoulder muscles peaked up to his ears. He towered over Tom a good five inches and outweighed him by seventy-five pounds. He stood for a moment flexing his huge biceps, facing Tom, the look of wonder deepening on his face.

"I say, Tommie," broke in Davison, "cut it, old chap! It's a fair sportin' proposition to gamble for the bally things. I've more than half agreed with Reddy, and so has Cox here. It ain't as if we couldn't trust you. We want the fun. Let's be friends and quit ragging."

Effingham had been lying on his back, smiling and unmoved.

"Tommie," said he, "you're outnumbered, old man. It isn't so almighty unfair for the majority to ask a reconsideration under the circumstances. Now I'm in favor of a little friendly game myself; so we're five to one against you. Hand over the loot!"

Tom raged inwardly and his eyes still blazed at Welsh. Physically he had no chance with the giant, but he was angry enough to have fought a mad bull. He groped in the breast of his pajamas, tore the pouch from the strand of fiber that held it round his neck and flung it on the ground.

"Have it your own way, you —— fools!" said he savagely. "There'll be some scores to settle over this yet!"

* * *

THE pearls constituting the "bank" were sorted out and placed in several small calabashes, each supposed to hold gems of equal value. The small, irregular pearls in one calabash were rated at twenty-five cents; the next grade at half a dollar, and so on, in progression. The four finer gems had a calabash to themselves and ranked at fifty dollars apiece. The values were purely fictitious, of course, and assumed for the sake of simplicity in cashing in the chips, but the arrangement was as fair as possible.

It took some pains to arrive at all this, but in the end all were satisfied, and the wooden chips were carefully counted out and divided equally among the sextet. The assumed value of the chips coincided with that of the pearls, and the few that were left were carefully destroyed at Effingham's suggestion.

Effingham took the four large pearls in the hollow of his hand and studied them with interest. Three of them were a soft, smoky gray, of the kind known as black pearls; the fourth was a delicate pink.

"Beautiful, useless things," said he, musingly. "Curious, isn't it, that most fine gems have blood on them? These four, now! Who knows what deviltry they'll stir up before some fool buys them for a woman's neck? I think I'll win these myself!"

"Your deal, Matthews," said Welsh sharply as Tom cut a deuce.

Tom shared in full the suppressed excitement as he dealt the cards. The game of draw poker had taken a new and tremendous importance. Each shuffle of the cards had a bearing on his future; every hand played would be a crisis. And though his mind was centered on the cards and the players every detail of the game and its properties was filed away, never to be forgotten, in his subconscious memory.

The *lanai* was well sheltered by mimosa on one side and the windbreak of canvas on the other; but there was a stir in the air, and the windbreak bellied and swayed while the leaves of the flimsy roof rustled and slatted loose in the heavy gusts. The birds had finished nesting and bustled about uneasily, ready for their long flight northward. Some of them invaded the *lanai* and waddled impudently about, peering curiously at the group of players and quite fearless.

The wind had hauled to the south, and the sun set coldly in a sea of pale yellow. The palms creaked protestingly, and little vortices of sand went spinning along the beach. The surf broke heavily on the reef and the air was laden with the portent of a southerly storm.

With the exception of Effingham, who always in some mysterious manner managed to clothe himself in white-duck trousers, sandals and a clean shirt, they were all clad in pajamas, soiled and ragged and stained, the shiftless uniform of low latitudes; every man in his bare feet, and all of them weather-beaten and hard of feature. Behind them squatted the Kanakas, born gamblers at heart, fascinated by the tensity of the game and criticizing the play in whispers.

Douchet won the first pot. He played most card games well, but his Gallic temperament interfered with his proficiency at poker. He scooped in the chips greedily.

"Bad luck, Frenchy," said Cox. "You'll catch it later on."

"You watch me an' play your 'and the bes' you know how," replied Douchet with a sneer. "Maybe you catch somesing yourself!"

They played with varying luck for many hours. At nightfall the Kanakas brought lanterns and the game went on uninterrupted. No one thought of food. With the pearls before their eyes each played a close, careful game, and the taut strain of excitement lasted from beginning to end. There were no songs and only such conversation as applied to the game. They were sparing of drinks at first, but toward morning their last case of gin was broached and a bottle placed beside each man.

When any one laughed it was high-pitched and nervous. There were several sharp arguments over various plays, but no serious dispute until toward morning when Effingham, having won a considerable sum, counted out fifty dollars' worth of chips, put these in the calabash and took out a black pearl, which he laid beside his other chips.

" 'Ere," said Welsh, "that'll never do! No cashin' in till the gyme's over!"

"And why not?"

"Because, wot 'ave we got these counters for? We'll 'ave the 'ole bally business in a mess first thing we know."

"I've played some poker, but I never heard of a rule to prevent a man cashing in all or a part of his winnings at any stage of the game. I'm playing for those four pearls, Reddy, if I can get them; but you've got more than enough chips yourself; why not take one, too?"

It was a "bluff" on Effingham's part, but it sufficed. Welsh actually did, at the suggestion of the superior mind, exchange fifty dollars' worth of chips for a pearl. Then Effingham, soon after, having Welsh's hand alone against him, deliberately tossed his pearl into the pot for a fifty-dollar raise. Welsh was obliged to meet it with his own pearl in order to call, and Effingham took the pot.

There was a lengthy argument at this, the contention being that it took too many chips out of circulation and that a man should not cash in unless he wished to withdraw. Effingham settled the debate by calmly putting back the pearls and taking the chips.

"You fellows are perfectly correct," said he. "I only wanted to establish a precedent. It is now understood that we play for chips only and that not a pearl can be taken till we cash in. At the same time I consider I've won these two fairly and claim the privilege of exchanging chips for them when the game is over, if I have them. I've told you I intend to win those four—any objections?"

"No!" snapped Douchet. He was a heavy winner. "Deal dose cards!"

AT DAWN they were still playing. The boys now brought them food, which they ate mechanically, without stopping the game.

Toward noon Davison went broke. The long hours and strain told on his gross body, and his was no match for the clearer heads of the others. He was, in fact, stupidly drowsy when he played away his last few chips, and without a word he staggered outside, threw himself on the sand and was instantly fast asleep.

Cox lost his last chip at about five in the afternoon. During the last few hands he had sat trembling, his face pale and pathetically drawn; and when the end came he appeared dazed, plucking at his lower lip and gazing wistfully at the pearls; strangely enough, with the same fatuous smile under his tawny, sunburned mustache. Then he, too, went sound asleep, rolling over where he sat.

At midnight he awoke and sat up, blinking. Then his roving eyes took in the situation, and he clapped his hands to his forehead.

"Oh, my God!" he cried, and threw himself at full length, his head in his arms, his whole body shaking with hysterical sobbing.

Outside, beyond the windbreak, they heard Davison's voice mumbling as if he were only half awake; and then he began to sing, low and haltingly, as if the song came from a half-forgotten past—

"I'm wearing awa', Jean,
Like the snow in a thaw, Jean;
I'm wearing awa',
To the land o' the leal."

It struck Matthews like a blow, for the simple Scotch ballad was the favorite of the Girl at Home. He had never heard it sung with the pathos and expression in the drunken beach-comber's voice. He had been playing as greedily and mercilessly as the others, at a high nervous tension, and it lifted him from the game momentarily like a shock.

He looked at the groveling Cox with a sense of shame and pity. What a ghastly business they were about!

He was ready to flame out with a hot protest against the game when he caught Effingham's gaze fixed upon him steadily. Effingham was smiling slightly as if he divined Tom's thought, and his eyes shifted meaningly to the others.

Douchet was leaning forward, his whole meager soul centered on the cards in Effingham's hand, waiting for the deal. The snarl on his lips was more wolfish than ever, and the man was actually quivering with sheer cupidity.

Welsh sat with his huge forearms on his knees, his hands clenched till the knuckles showed white, his heavy jaw shot forward and his little eyes gleaming like twin sparks under the shaggy, overhanging brows.

"It's been a long session," said Effingham. "Want to cash in, anybody?"

"Deal!" said Welsh roughly. "It's a freeze-out now. 'Ole 'og or none!"

Effingham rolled and lighted a cigaret, riffled the cards several times in his lean, sensitive fingers, passed them to Tom for the cut, and swiftly dealt them round. Tom was well ahead of the game; Welsh and Douchet had nearly the same number of chips apiece; and Effingham had neatly piled in front of him counters to the exact amount of two hundred dollars. As Douchet picked up his cards they all saw the exulting gleam in his eye.

Nevertheless Welsh shoved a handful of chips into the pot. Tom looked at his hand and counted out the requisite number to make good. Ordinarily he would have raised, but Douchet's gleeful face and Welsh's readiness made him cautious.

Effingham dropped, and Douchet, with a Gallic whoop of joy threw in four *kou*-wood chips. Welsh studied, glowering, for a while; then with a deep curse made good, and Tom did the same.

Then Effingham did a curious thing. Taking his discarded hand he deliberately tore it across twice and threw the fragments over his shoulder.

"Cards, gentlemen?" said he calmly.

Douchet took one; Welsh two; and Tom, his voice as hoarse as a crow's, called for one and picked it up with a hand shaking like a leaf. Instantly Welsh shoved his whole pile forward, picked up his gin bottle and drank a full half-pint of the raw spirit.

Without waiting for Tom to bet, Douchet, with a laugh that was almost a scream, threw his own chips in and reached out his hands like grapples, ready to scoop in the pot, his eyes gloating on the calabashes of pearls.

"Hold on, Frenchy! Show them down first!" cried Tom as he counted out chips to close the pot.

"Four queens!" bellowed Welsh.

"Four h'aces!" screamed Douchet. "Beat zat, you —— fools!"

"Gentlemen," said Tom, "I have a small straight flush!" and laid down a flush in hearts from the deuce to the six.

For a moment there was absolute silence. Then Douchet sprang up, his knife in his hand. But Cox reached out suddenly and caught him by the ankle, effectually tripping him up. Then he rose and stamped on Douchet's fingers till the Frenchman dropped the knife and finished by kicking him heartily in the ribs.

"Take that, you —— cur!" he cried, still sobbing hysterically. "Can't you take your medicine like a gentleman?"

Welsh had risen to his knees and clutched at Tom, but Effingham had a heavy black revolver in his hand.

"Drop that, Reddy!" said he sharply.

He hastily dumped the pearls together into one calabash.

"Here, Tommie, take 'em. Mine too. No time to settle it now. Joey, you go stop Tomi's house, see no one stealum. You no sleep! Take care of yourself now, Tommie; mind your eye! I'm—I'm all in!"

He had no sooner spoken than a terrible fit of coughing seized him, a red foam appeared on his lips, and he fell over in a dead faint.

Tom caught up the revolver and emptied the pearls into the oilskin pouch.

"Now," said he, "there's been enough of this foolery! You've had your fun and I hope you're all satisfied. Hereafter you let me alone, all of you, and don't try any monkey tricks unless you want a taste of lead.

"I've won these things and I'm going to hold them; but if you stand off I'll play fair, and more. When the time comes I'll give every one of you a share. Try any dirty work and you won't get it!"

Cox had been hanging on his words as a condemned man might listen to a reprieve. He sprang forward, caught Tom by the hand and wrung it, the tears falling down his gaunt, leathery cheeks.

"God bless you for that, Tommie! God bless you!" he cried, his voice hoarse and shaking.

Outside the *lanai* Davison's voice had risen into stronger volume:

"There's nae sorrow there, Jean;
There's neither cauld nor care, Jean.
The day is aye fair
In the land o' the leal."

CHAPTER XII

NIGHT AMONG THE TREES

EFFINGHAM, like Tom, occupied one of the tents. When Tom had secured the pearls he helped Joey get the sick man to his bunk and sat with him till Effingham recovered from his fainting spell and fell into normal sleep. Then Tom went to his own tent and lay down.

Body and brain had reached the limit of endurance. It occurred to him that he ought to find a hiding-place for the pearls at once, but he was too exhausted to make the effort. Just as he was falling asleep Joey, who had stationed himself outside with a rifle, put his head in through the flap of the tent.

"Tomi," said he, "I stop here outside; maybe bimeby tired I 'fraid I *moemoe* (sleep). Then I speak Keola, he come."

"All right, Joey," said Tom drowsily; "now clear out!"

And immediately he lost consciousness.

He awoke in the pitch darkness that precedes dawn, his senses tingling and alert. He could see absolutely nothing, but something was moving inside the tent. Something that breathed heavily was stealthily crawling toward his bunk! He had taken the precaution to keep Effingham's revolver strapped to his wrist by the leather thong, and it fell naturally into his palm as he rose to a sitting posture.

"Is that you, Joey?" he called.

There was no reply. Instinctively he clutched at his breast. The pearls were gone! At the instant of discovery he fired in the direction of the sound, and by the flash saw a form rising from the ground and a livid face with a knife in its teeth. Before he could fire again he was grappling with a snarling, rabid creature that sprang at him bodily and clutched his throat. He knew it was Douchet.

The man was panting with hate and passion, and though Tom was far stronger and heavier, for a moment the Frenchman had him at a disadvantage. He stabbed viciously with the knife, and by sheer luck Tom parried the blow with his arm and caught Douchet by the wrist. The Frenchman's teeth sank into his other arm and Tom staggered, missed his footing and fell backward, carrying the tent with him.

Both he and Douchet were still struggling, but they were soon involved in the folds of the tent and practically helpless. Tom wriggled and fought with the heavy canvas to free himself, when he felt some one hauling at it from the outside.

Presently he spun round in the folds; the tent came away clear, and he was lying on his back blinking at a light shining in his eyes. Davison stood near, holding a lantern, while Welsh, who had torn away the tent, towered over him, his eyes bloodshot and ablaze with ferocity. Douchet who had tumbled sprawling out of the folds, was rising to his feet.

Near by, lying on its back, its arms outspread in the form of a crucifix, lay the dead body of Keola, the Hawaiian.

Welsh fell upon Tom and pinned him down. With a great paw he tore open the tunic of his pajamas and fumbled at his breast.

"Where are those pearls?" he roared. "Wot 'ave you done with 'em?"

Tom, whose breath was clean gone, made no reply. Welsh sprang up, caught Douchet by the hair and shook him clear of the ground.

"You French rat!" he cried. "Wot the —— are you doin' 'ere? Answer me that, you traitor!"

"I—I come for dose pearl," gasped the Frenchman. "I come to keel 'im for dose pearl!"

" 'Ave you got 'em?"

"No! He shoot at me an' den ze —— tent come down. I try to get heem wit' my knife."

Welsh tore at the Frenchman's clothing and explored his person thoroughly, leaving him nearly naked, but the pearls were not to be found.

"Look out, Reddy!" called Davison suddenly, for Tom had risen to his feet.

The revolver still hung from his wrist by the leather thong, and he raised it and fired point blank at Welsh. But his arm was aching from Douchet's bite, the giant's figure was merely spectral in the dancing light of the lantern, and the shot went wide. Welsh reached him with a bound, tore the weapon from his grasp, and struck him with his fist, full in the face.

Tom did not wholly lose consciousness. He felt himself being trussed up in some fashion and then dragged bodily along the ground as they dragged sacks of guano. He smelled the sickish odor of trade gin, a warm liquor flooded his mouth and burned his lips and, gasping and coughing, he came to his senses.

He was sitting under a tree, his back against it. His ankles were bound together and his arms hauled above his head by a rope tied tightly around each of his thumbs.

Welsh stood confronting him, the ends of the ropes, which had been cast over the limb of a tree, in his hand. Davison, with the light, was holding a gin-bottle to his lips. Douchet stood by, the bare knife in his hand, and in the rear Cox hovered, his erubescent nose gleaming on a face as white as chalk, his smile gone for once, and anxiety and fear in his eyes.

Beyond the circle of light it was pitch dark; but far off on the horizon, just barely visible, was the first thin streak of dawn. The palms creaked and bent in the strong wind, and the air was dank and sodden with the approaching storm.

Inland the birds rustled and chattered uneasily, and Tom could hear from Effingham's tent the sick man's steady, tearing cough. His mind registered these impressions vaguely, for he was still dazed, and his arms ached horribly from the tension on his thumbs. Welsh gave the ropes a jerk.

"Stand up!" said he harshly.

He was drunk and swaying on his feet, a terrible figure of primitive passion and power. Tom rose in response to his tug at the rope.

"Matthews, where are those pearls?"

"I don't know. One of you swine who wanted to gamble for them and lost has stolen them."

"You lie! You've 'idden them. Give them up or tell where they are! If you don't——"

He gave another pull on the rope and Tom felt exquisite anguish thrill through his arms. The monstrous injustice and brutality of the thing filled him with blind rage.

"You —— brutes!" he cried. "I tell you they're gone and even if I had them I'd see you all to ——! You've stolen them—after I'd promised you a share, too. You can kill me, you cowardly blackguards—you're four to one. If you don't I'll pay you for this!"

"Oh, I say, stop this!"

It was Cox's voice, tremulous but resolute.

"Let that man alone! He's a good chum, Tommie is, and he's played square; he's the only square one among us. What a cursed pack of brutes you are!"

Douchet turned with an oath and menaced him with his knife. Cox retreated hurriedly.

"I haven't a weapon, blast you," said he, "but I'm going to get one!"

"Matthews," said Welsh, "give in! Tell where the bloomin' things are and we'll whack up again. I've nothing against you, man, but that story of whackin' up when you're good an' ready, while we stands 'oppin' from one foot to the other, don't go down. You can't 'ave all that swag to yourself. Do you squeal?"

Tom ground his teeth and his eyes blazed, but he made no reply. Welsh gathered the ropes and hauled viciously. Tom was jerked almost clear of the ground, every joint from thumb to shoulder seeming to rend apart. His eyes started from his head and the sweat broke out all over his body. The pulses in his head drummed frantically and waves of red fluid seemed flowing over his eyeballs. There was a sudden dull sound, and, as if from a blow, Welsh leaped in the air, then plunged headforemost into the sand.

There was no sound of a shot; nothing had stirred apparently, and excepting for the wind in the trees it was so still that Tom could hear the ceaseless coughing of Effingham in his tent. The taut ropes relaxed; Tom's arms fell to his side, quite benumbed; and he fumbled helplessly at the ropes to release himself. Douchet stood facing him for an instant with a startled expression, then, snarling like a wild beast, he leaped at Tom, his knife in his hand, his arm raised to strike.

The blow never fell. Tom heard a soft thud, something like the impact of a man's fist on a sack of meal; the Frenchman threw up his arms with a gurgling cry; his whole body went limp and he collapsed in a heap. He writhed spasmodically for a moment, then lay still. A heavy knife was buried in his ribs, the hilt protruding beneath his arm!

Tom with his own knife cut the ropes from his hands and ankles, sprang forward, and snatched the revolver from Welsh's belt. Davison stood stupefied, his flabby jowls hanging and his eyes staring.

Welsh rolled over and sat up. He felt the side of his head dazedly, and his hand came away covered with blood. Something had shattered and torn the cartilage of his ear. He got to his feet unsteadily—to find Tom confronting him with the revolver.

"Hold hard there, Welsh! Not a move or you'll never make another. The tables are turned, you see."

Welsh looked stupidly at his bloody hand, then about him till his eye caught the body of Douchet.

"So they are," said he. "You've done for that chap. 'E's good an' dead, 'e is. But wot 'it me?"

Cox came running up with a rifle. When he saw the situation he stared and gaped in bewilderment.

"Why, what's all this? I thought—I say, Tommie, good for you! Davie, you —— scoundrel, what do you mean by standing in with those blackguards? Haven't you a rag of honor left? Why couldn't you take Tommie's word? Now you've ruined the lot of us."

Davison stood sullenly, holding the lantern and looking down, and made no reply.

"Don't be too sure of that, Cox," said Matthews. "Wait till the pearls turn up. This is only the beginning of this business. As for you, Davison, I esteem you as what Cox said you are. You're mean and contemptible enough, —— knows, but you're a poor figure as a ruffian. I'd have been white to you, man; as it is I'll pay you in full for your part in this."

"So be it!" said Davison sulkily, tugging at his mustache. "By gad, sir, it's easy for you to talk, standing there with a gun at our heads; and it was easy enough for you to promise things with your blasted cock-of-the-walk air and supercilious manner after winning all the pearls. The rest of us are ruined men. I haven't a —— rag of conscience left; but, by gad, I'd rather steal from you outright than stand around waiting for you to dole out largess."

Welsh stood with his hand to his shattered ear, but his big body was set and his eyes alert for any advantage. Tom kept the revolver moving from him to Davison, his finger on the trigger.

"By George," said he, "if I were like you two I'd kill you both in your tracks! Unfortunately I have a prejudice against cold-blooded murder. One of you, probably Douchet, killed Keola; and one of you stole the pearls. You strung me up here when you were three to one—Cox wasn't in that, I believe. You're two to one, now, and you'll never have another chance. I'll be ready for you next time."

It was daybreak, and yellow streaks were shooting up from the eastern rim of the sea, struggling through layers of sullen clouds. Joey came running up out of breath.

"*Ehipi* (ship)," he cried excitedly; "*e-hipi* come!"

CHAPTER XIII

"COMMODORE" FRAWLEY ARRIVES

THE four men looked at one another.

"My ——!" said Welsh. "It's old man Wiggins, an' we've left all that shell on the bloomin' beach! If Wiggins sees it 'e'll leave us all 'ere to rot 'less 'e gets 'is 'ands on the pearls!"

They ran toward the beach and followed it, past the dwellings and the neglected shell, to the low hill where Effingham stood looking through the telescope. The wind-rack was flying low, the sea was dotted with whitecaps, and to the southward the horizon was blurred with a dingy brown, like a pall of smoke.

Off the eastern end of the island, not more than five miles away, a schooner under full sail was bearing down to the anchorage. That it was not their own ship they saw at a glance, for the *Mamaloa* carried square foretopsails and this was a straight fore-and-after. Moreover, she was clean and white, with none of the dingy look of a trader.

"What do you make of her, Walt?" asked Tom anxiously.

"Nothing definite," Effingham replied; "I've a shrewd guess, though. Whether I'm right or not, you can mark one thing—that schooner is not here on a pleasure trip."

"What's the guess, old man?"

Effingham closed the telescope with a snap.

"Have you ever heard," he asked, "of a man called 'Commodore' Frawley?"

"Frawley," said Tom; "why he's the other man who applied for the charter, isn't he?"

"The same. The man who applied for, and in all probability has it. At any rate his coming means one thing—trouble, short, sharp and sudden; especially when he sees all that shell lying around loose. Now's the time to bury those pearls of yours, Tom."

"I would if I had them to bury. They were stolen from me last night."

"What! Stolen?"

"They were stolen by some one who will answer for it later, unless it was Douchet who is lying dead up there under the trees. Reddy the bushranger took a fancy to string me up by the thumbs a while ago, Effingham, for what reason the Lord only knows, as the pearls were already gone. There was some shooting, and I wonder you didn't hear the racket."

"You can lie all you want about the pearls, Matthews," said Welsh grimly; "but you'd 'ave been strung up proper if I 'adn't got that crack on the 'ead."

Effingham opened the telescope and took another look at the schooner.

"I did hear a shindy of some kind," said he, "but I was too used up to take much interest. I saw that your tent was down, though, and that somebody had knifed Keola."

He closed the telescope again and faced them. Tom saw that there was a change in the man. His languidly careless air was gone, and his face was set with deep, purposeful lines.

"Those cursed pearls," said he, "were bound to make strife and trouble. They'll probably turn up later and lead to more battle, murder and sudden death. Just now there's other important business on hand, and we had better stand together till it's over. There's about one chance in a hundred that that schooner isn't coming here heeled for trouble, whether it's Frawley or not. It may be necessary to put up a fight."

"Wot are we goin' to fight with?" asked Welsh.

It was a problem indeed if the visitors were well armed, which was almost a foregone conclusion. Every man on the island had a knife, but the only other armament was a pin-fire shotgun, a couple of rifles, one of them an old needle-gun such as the German firm supplied for trade—about as dangerous to the man who fired it as to any one else—and three revolvers.

"We haven't much of an arsenal," said Tom. "Some of us ought to keep under cover with it. In that way we'll have the drop on them, which will be that much advantage if it comes to a scrap. The rest can be the reception committee."

"That's good generalship," said Effingham. "If they are overhasty, though, they may cut up rough with that committee."

"I'll take that end of it," said Tom.

"Me, too," said Welsh. "I'm not much on the shoot, and if it comes to narstiness

I'd rather get these two fins on the man that tries it."

"Walter," said Tom, as they hurried to get together the guns and ammunition, "who killed Douchet? *They* think it was I, but it wasn't. And what the deuce was it that bowled Welsh over? If I hadn't heard you coughing all the time, over in your tent, I'd think you had a hand in it."

"My cough was pretty bad," replied Effingham. "I wasn't capable of much damage last night. Perhaps Joey knows something. He'd be very sore on some one about Keola, you know. The boys were great friends."

The schooner came on in a smother of foam and luffed in the little bay with a great snapping of sail and creaking of blocks. A boat put off at once, and as it grounded, half a dozen men leaped out and ran it up on the beach.

The man who had wielded the nineteen-foot steering-oar stepped ashore, halting a moment to light the stub of a cigar which he held clenched in his strong teeth. He was tall, and very broad and powerful of physique. His forehead was wide, the hair gray about the temples, and his eyes deep-sunken and of a cold, steely blue. He wore white duck trousers, canvas shoes, carefully pipe-clayed, and a blue serge jacket.

He glanced about him shrewdly with a masterful air of self-possession. Tom stood with folded arms, leaning against the doorway of a hut, talking to Effingham. As the man stepped ashore Effingham gripped his arm, his fingers like steel bands.

"That's the man," said he in a tense whisper. "That's Commodore Frawley!"

Tom surveyed the visitor with interest as he walked toward him on the beach. He was a man whose name had supplied elaborate material for gossip in various parts of the world. The black sheep of an excellent family who had long since repudiated him, he had led a wayward and checkered existence as a sailor on the Great Lakes, newspaper man, card-sharp and swindler, and various other forms of activity. His picture adorned the Rogues' Gallery in New York City.

At forty-five, polished, suave, a manly and attractive figure, he had put through his crowning achievement, which consisted in acquiring by a partial payment one of the finest schooner yachts in Gravesend Bay and promoting a fantastic scheme for touring out-of-the-way parts of the world with a party of writers and artists who were supposed to produce material to be sold for vast sums to newspaper syndicates and magazines.

He organized a company to equip the yacht with essentials and luxuries and bear the expenses of this extraordinary cruise, which spoke well for his ability as a promoter, for the project was more or less chimerical and would never have held water under proper investigation.

Once beyond the three-mile limit, with the master's papers in his pocket, Frawley forgot all about the company, except to draw upon it for large sums until the company grew wary and finally withdrew its support. The artists were dropped at near-by ports; and Frawley, with the company's money, began a piratical cruise of three years which led him around the world and eventually to the South Seas.

He had flown commodore and vice-commodore flags of well-known yacht clubs, regardless of the Yachting Register, and thus earned the title of commodore, though he had never held any executive office in any yacht club. He had been received, by virtue of letters furnished by the company, at the most exclusive clubs in the civilized ports of the world and maintained himself, the yacht and its crew, by gambling and the promotion of numerous swindling enterprises. He had a system of "cappers," and with his own personality he found easy prey among the gullible.

But the thing could not last. At the end of three years his doings had attained a wide publicity, and he found it impossible to return on his tracks or make a port the second time without finding trouble awaiting him. Then the toils closed in on him, and the yacht was finally seized at Auckland under attachment and sold for more ignominious uses than a gentleman's cruiser.

Such was the audacity of Frawley that he eventually bought the yacht for a song through an agent, and turned his undoubted talents into the hodge-podge scramble for dollars in the South Seas.

He had promoted schemes for planting cacao and vanilla in Samoa, and was the active, working member of an influential Chinese firm in Canton which was intimately concerned in island enterprise. They bought copra, pearls and *bêche-de-mer*, had a small fleet of schooners in trade;

and of these and other activities "Commodore" Frawley was the guiding spirit. In spite of a bluff heartiness and geniality of manner, it was said that no way of making a dollar was too mean or dishonorable for his consideration.

* * *

FRAWLEY came briskly along the beach, his muscular hands thrust in the pockets of his coat, puffing at the stub of his cigar. Tom noted that the crew of the whale-boat carried rifles. Frawley cast a shrewd glance at the pearl-shell, round which there still clung the awful odor of rotten oysters, and sniffed the air daintily as Tom and Welsh came forward to meet him.

"How are you, gentlemen?" said he. "Nice place you have here, but I wouldn't recommend it as a health resort. The stink of pearl-shell is pretty poisonous, not to mention the guano."

"Glad to see you, sir," said Tom mendaciously, for want of something better. "We've been wondering what wind blew you in. Come up and have a peg and tell us about it."

"Certainly, boys," said Frawley. "I'm here on official business, but I'll take a drink with you. We've something to talk over."

As they found seats in the *lanai* on wooden packing-boxes Tom saw that the schooner was tossing furiously at her short cable. The impending storm was at hand and the brown mist was sweeping closer over the sea. Frawley's eyes roved about appraisingly while a Kanaka boy opened one of the last bottles of gin.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

His question was partly answered by Cox and Davison strolling over from one of the huts. They were unable to restrain their curiosity, and paid no attention to Tom's scowl of disapproval. Frawley nodded as he poured himself a drink.

"Come into the circle, you fellows. I want you all to hear what I've got to say. Meantime here's luck!" and he tossed off the drink.

"Boys," he continued, "this is a mighty lonely station. I expect you're rather tired of it, eh?"

"W'y that all depends," said Welsh. "Now to my mind this 'ere's a cozy, tight little island. Like 'ome to me, it is."

"I guess we can stick it out a while longer," said Tom dryly. "What is it, Frawley?"

"Well, if that's the way you all feel, I expect I've bad news for you. The fact is I have the charter for working this island."

"The —— you say!" This from Welsh.

"Fact! I'm surprized to find you fellows here. I didn't think Wiggins was fool enough to make himself liable this way. It's a serious offense. However, that's not your fault, and as far as I can see no harm has been done; only now the jig is up and you'll have to clear. I don't believe you'll mind changing to a sweeter atmosphere. You must have had a rough time; and mind you—" he swept a glance around the group —"I've every intention of being reasonable."

Tom sat twirling his untasted drink around in his tin cup.

"What's your proposition, commodore?" he asked without raising his eyes.

"Why, I'll tell you. You fellows have worked hard at the guano, it seems, and—and getting out that shell. It saves me just that much trouble, and as long as you are paid for your labor I don't suppose it matters whether it's Wiggins' money or mine. Then, of course, there's that shell and—and the pearls. Did I mention that I knew there was shell here when I applied for the charter?"

Tom licked his dry lips.

"Go on!" he said.

Frawley looked from face to face, smiling blandly. Tom sat looking steadily at the tin cup in his hand. His indignation was turning to hard, cold desperation as he waited for the ultimatum.

"I don't imagine you want to work for me," continued Frawley, biting hard on his cigar, "and anyway I don't want you. So I'm willing to give you a passage to any port I make, or, if you prefer it, there's your own boat, a good able sea-boat, and I'll outfit you with provisions.

"You are to turn over to me all the pearls you found, and if they're worth anything I'll give you five per cent. of their value, and in addition pay every one of you white men a hundred dollars, gold, for the work you've done. Come, now; I call that liberal!"

Welsh sprang up with an inarticulate bellow. A clubbed rifle in the hands of one of Frawley's men struck him from behind, and he fell sprawling.

Tom tugged at the revolver in his belt. Frawley's men were all on their feet, their rifles cocked and held in readiness. Frawley stood watching Tom, his hands in his coat pockets, his lips twitching with an ironical smile.

"I wouldn't try anything rash," said he suavely. "You might regret it. My men are ready to drill you at a word, and there's another boat-load just landing down below. I'd as soon shoot or hang the lot of you for a pack of thieves as not. Better take my offer under consideration."

There was a hollow cough close by.

"Frawley!" said a soft, silken voice.

Effingham stood in the doorway of the nearest hut, his elbow against the jamb, his other hand resting lightly on his hip. He appeared almost lazily calm and looked at the commodore with his accustomed half-mocking smile, but Tom saw that his eyes were as hard as flint. The smile faded from the commodore's face, and Tom fancied that he paled slightly under the tan.

"So, commodore," said Effingham; "at your old tricks, eh?"

"I've made myself plain," said Frawley. "If you're one of this crew and heard me, you understand well enough."

"Oh, I heard you, but it wasn't necessary. The sight of you was enough to show that there was something dirty on foot. But it's come to a show-down, commodore. Do you know what I think? I think you've turned your last trick."

Frawley laughed harshly.

"Effingham, you're a fool! The odds are against you."

He looked swiftly over his shoulder at the second boat's crew beaching their boat, then back at Effingham. Tom thought it odd the way the two men faced each other as if there were no other actors in the drama. It was odd, too, that in spite of his sneering assurance there was something anxious and wavering about the big commodore, while Effingham, ill and emaciated though he was, seemed perfectly self-possessed and confident in his attitude.

"*You* are the fool, Frawley. I've had you covered since you came. Joey, the Kanaka boy, has a gun trained on you right now, and Joey can shoot! I taught him.

"But Joey's not going to hurt you, you bogus commodore and swindler. I'm going to do it myself!"

As he stepped out from the doorway, his right hand dropped from his hip and rested lightly by his thigh. There was a report and a flash. Frawley had shot through the pocket of his coat. Tom felt the wind of the bullet and the pungent powder-smoke in his nostrils.

At the same instant something spun by him in the air like a flash of light; there was an odd, thudding sound; the commodore's knees sagged under him; and with a sobbing oath he fell forward on his face, a knife buried in his breast.

But he had withdrawn his hand with the revolver from his pocket; and, raising himself on his elbow, he fired again. Effingham snatched Davison's revolver and fired once, and Frawley collapsed. Stepping quickly forward, Effingham deliberately fired the remaining five charges into the writhing body; then, coughing violently, with a bloody foam on his lips, he fell to his knees and then to full length beside the body of the commodore.

CHAPTER XIV

EFFINGHAM PASSES

NOT another man had moved. Now with an oath a sailor raised his rifle; but before he could pull the trigger there was a roar and a flash within the hut and he pitched forward, shot through the head. Welsh, who had been merely stunned, sprang at the man nearest him, wrenched the rifle from his hands and cracked the man's skull with a full-arm swing.

Tom felt something scorching plow through his scalp, and, turning, saw the man who had shot at him kneeling and pumping in another cartridge. He dropped quickly on all fours as the man fired, and Cox, who had been standing behind him, spun round and fell with a bullet in his brain. Tom promptly shot the sailor and took his gun and cartridge-belt.

He turned to shoot at a man aiming at Davison, but before he could do so the latter leaped forward with surprizing agility, grasped the gun-barrel in the sailor's hands and smote his opponent on the jaw. As he staggered, Davison sprang upon him, stabbing wickedly with his knife.

There were yells from the other boat's crew, and the two remaining men in the *lanai* took to their heels and ran toward their companions. Joey stood in the doorway of the hut with Effingham's rifle and took a pot-shot at the fleeing men. He missed them both, but the bullet struck one of the advancing seamen in the leg and he fell with a shriek.

The wind had risen to a gale, and with it came torrents of rain. There was the sharp report of a small cannon from the schooner, and a moment later another. She was tossing about, half-smothered, with two rags of sail flying loose.

The seamen halted when their comrades joined them. At the second report of the schooner's cannon they fired a harmless volley into the *lanai*, then turned and fled toward their boats, dragging the wounded man with them.

"After them!" roared Welsh, and ran down the beach, shooting as he ran.

Three of the Kanaka boys, brave in the enemy's retreat, followed him. One of them was armed with the useless fowling-piece, with which he blazed away at the sailors as fast as he could load; another had the needle-gun, and the third took Effingham's rifle from Joey, who was on his knees bending over Effingham.

A sudden gust of wind tore off the roof of the *lanai* and whirled it away in fragments, the canvas windbreak sailing off like a great white bird. Joey grasped Tom by the arm.

"Tomi," said he, "Epihama very sick. More better take inside."

Effingham was lying with his head on his arms, a pool of blood under him. There was no wound on his body, for both of Frawley's bullets had missed. He was unconscious, and breathed in long, gasping sighs. Together they lifted and carried him into one of the palm-leaf shelters, for the tents were down, and made him as comfortable as possible on a bunk.

Tom could think of no other restorative than gin, and went in search of some in the wreck of the *lanai*. He heard firing down the beach, and then a crash of shots from seaward. Davison was standing in the driving rain, watching with straining eyes.

"Look!" he cried. "I believe the beggars have potted Welsh and the boys, and by the Lord Harry, they're going to make the schooner!"

They caught glimpses of the boat tossed like a cork close to the vessel. Somehow her crew must have got aboard, for presently they saw her, empty and adrift, while the schooner, having slipped her cable, pointed for the open sea under her forestaysail and a rag of foresail.

Had she been less staunch and able she would never have made it; but she was a fin-keel schooner, built to eat up into the wind's eye, and had won races against some of the finest yachts in the world when oak and teak and not buckling metal-plate girders were the staples of yacht construction. She shaved the reef by no more than a few fathoms, lying down almost flat, and a quarter of an hour later was lost to view.

Welsh came reeling up the beach alone, a wild figure with a bullet wound in his cheek.

"The fools!" he cried. "They would stand there on the open beach, yellin' and shootin' at nothin', and they potted 'em from the boat. The 'ole three are deader than Davy's sow. Gimme a drink o' that gin!"

Tom had found a bottle nearly full and passed it to Welsh, who gulped down several swallows. Then Tom went to Effingham. Joey had been administering the Polynesian massage known as *lomi-lomi*. Effingham's eyes were open, but he was very weak, and waved away the gin. His eyes looked a question.

"They've gone," said Tom; "cleared out with the schooner. We three and Welsh and Davison are all that are left, Walter."

Effingham smiled weakly, turned on his side and soon fell asleep.

Toward evening the rain ceased and there was a temporary lull in the wind. Tom found some food and took it with him to the spring. The wreck of the *lanai* with the stark bodies lying in pools of water was too gruesome a neighborhood for his nerves.

When he reviewed the events of the past few days he was surprized to find he was not horror-stricken. He felt as if he was very old and tired, as if eons had passed since he and his companions had come to open hostility. His nerves and brain were benumbed through reaction, and he was so overwhelmed with lassitude that he found it impossible to marshal his thoughts into any sort of sequence.

Effingham had been right about the pearls. Wherever they might be now, and he seemed to care very little at the moment, they had had their sanguinary baptism. They had been the direct cause of the taking-off of Keola and Douchet and indirectly of the day's bloody fight, for that might not have taken place had not Frawley made his outrageous offer. What was to come next?

He was in no state of mind to feel regret for Cox or the Kanaka boys, but he shuddered when he recalled the icy deliberation with which Effingham had slain Frawley. There was something uncanny in the courage and fatal accuracy of the dying man. But for him the commodore and his crew would have wiped them all out, and it occurred to Tom that he owed Effingham more than this, for it was plain enough now that Effingham had disabled Welsh and killed Douchet just in time to save his life.

No one else had the knack of flinging a knife with such deadly precision, yet Tom would have sworn that at the exact time of the episode he had heard Effingham's cough a hundred yards or more away.

He was so lost in thought that he did not see Joey beside him till the latter spoke.

"Tomi," said the boy, "Epihama speak you come."

He followed Joey to Effingham's shelter. On the way he saw Welsh and Davison in another shack, their heads close together in conversation.

He was shocked at the change in his friend. Effingham was propped up, smoking a cigaret, but so weak he could hardly carry it to his lips. His face was sunken and ghastly in its pallor, save for a bright spot on each cheek. When he spoke it was in a whisper.

"Sit down, Tommie, and tell Joey to clear out."

"Tommie," said he when the boy had gone, "there have been strenuous times!"

"Yes, old man, but don't let's talk about it till you get stronger. You need rest and quiet to put you on your feet."

"Never mind that; it's too late. The game's up for me and I've got to say some things while I'm able. Give me a drink; I'm as weak as a kitten."

Tom poured some gin in a cup and held it to his lips. It gave the sick man temporary strength, and he continued in a stronger voice.

"Don't look so glum, man. The strain has used up my nerve-force and set matters forward a day or two; that's all. How about those resolutions, now, Tommie? Still in evidence?"

"I give it up, Walt. Too many things have happened, and I've got to get straightened out mentally. Never mind about me. Don't talk——"

Effingham raised a protesting hand.

"I tell you time's precious. Don't waste it. Keep that gin handy, and if I begin to slump pour it into me. Now put your hand under the mats here, just by my head, and take out what you find."

Tom did as directed. He brought forth a paper, folded and sealed, and, groping further, to his astonishment, a familiar oil-skin pouch.

"By Jove!" he cried. "The pearls!"

Effingham smiled.

"Put that paper in your pocket," said he. "You are not to open it till—afterward. Tommie, I stole the pearls myself. It was the only thing to do under the circumstances. I knew that if I didn't one of the others would, and they were safer with me.

"You are too infernally trustful and careless. You never were a match for those beasts because you're too ready to trust men who are absolutely past trusting. You think that that 'one touch of nature' business is latent in all of us, but it isn't, Tommie; not in the South Seas. Take Douchet, for example. Give me a drink!"

Tom complied, and Effingham continued:

"It was easy enough to get the pearls, for you were as dead to the world as the Seven Sleepers; so I took them for safe-keeping. Afterward I heard the row, followed the lynching-party and managed to crack Welsh on the ear with a lump of coral and stick Douchet at the psychological moment. I'd have done for Welsh, too, but I had only the one knife and needed that for Frenchy."

"But," said Tom, "I heard you coughing the whole blessed time down here in your tent!"

"No, you didn't. That was Joey. I made him go inside and cough like the ——. I felt a spell coming on up there behind a palm and nearly had a fit fighting it down. It would have spoiled the whole show.

"You see, Tommie, there hasn't been a chance from the first to play fair with these chaps. They wouldn't stand for division, and they wouldn't stand for a trusteeship. They wouldn't stand for any other man beating them out at cards. When that kind of cussedness is so highly developed there's no possible chance of peace.

"Some one had to have the lion's share somehow, and I made sure that it would be you. I suppose you know that in that last round at poker I dealt cold hands all round?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, it's a fact. That pair was working up to a murderous pitch, and it was the only way to put an end to the game and cut the agony short. I was getting weaker every minute with the cursed cough coming on and knew I'd be out of the running soon, so I had to do it.

"And now, Tommie, you've got that bag safe, what are you going to do with it? Don't tell me that you're going to turn soft and let Davison and Welsh in after all that has been."

Tom was balancing the pouch on his palm.

"I don't know, Walt. I owe it to you to do as you say, of course. I'm deathly sick of this fighting and butchery—" he shuddered—"and the poor wretches didn't have them after all, though they tried enough to get them. Of course I didn't win them fairly——"

An enigmatical smile played round Effingham's bloodless lips.

"I guessed right, thank fortune!" said he, as if to himself. "Tommie, I wash my hands of you. Do as you please, only *don't* let them know till you're safe away from here. Now's your time to bury that pouch—deep."

At this moment Davison stuck his head in at the door, and his eyes instantly focused on the pouch in Tom's hand.

"I—er—er—was looking for you fellows. We've got the balance of the gin together—a couple of quarts. I guess we all need some. How are you, Effingham?"

"Fine!" said Effingham.

He put a great effort into the utterance of the single word and it sounded loud and strong.

"All right; good!" said Davison, his eyes still centered, as if fascinated, on the pouch. "Come and join us and have a peg. See you later," and he vanished.

Effingham lay back, breathing very faintly, his eyes closed. Presently he opened his eyes wearily.

"The fat's in the fire now, son," said he weakly. "Tommie, I'm nearly done. Look out for those chaps now. You and Joey stand together. He's a good boy, and you can trust him to the limit. You've got to beat those men."

"Walt," said Tom gravely, "it'll be all right, old man. You seem to have been on hand in my interest at every turn, the best friend that ever a man had. I—I want to tell you how I admire you and thank you——"

He suddenly choked.

Effingham feebly held out a hand as cold as ice. Tom held it for a moment in his. When he released it, it fell inertly. Effingham's lips moved and Tom bent closer.

"Leave—a while, Tommie. I'm tired—so tired! Come back later——"

"Yes, old man," said Tom, and was going softly toward the door when he heard a loud whisper.

He returned and bent close.

"Tommie—that man on the yacht I told you of—his name was Frawley. Understand? Commodore Frawley. I heard he was after charter—you fellows talking—in Suva—that's the reason I came. Knew he'd be here some time. Looked for his ship waiting—waiting to kill him like a dog! I'm quite content, Tommie. Run along a while."

Tom went out and sat on the beach, a prey to mingled emotions. His body was utterly exhausted, yet his nerves were wrought to an emotional pitch approaching hysteria. His mind was alert now to the horror of all that had taken place; the vices laid bare; the ten corpses lying unburied and staring at the sky; but most of all to the tragic pathos of Effingham, with all his fine attributes, dying a wrecked and broken thing, yet quite content and unafraid.

He rose and paced to and fro, for he could not keep still. His steps led him continually toward the hut, and several times he looked in at the door.

Effingham was lying quiet except for a continual fluttering of his hands. The flush on his cheeks had faded to a waxen pallor. Joey stood peering in the doorway, a look of misery and concern on his brown face; and finally Tom, convinced that the end had come, for the fluttering hands were still, stepped within.

Suddenly Effingham sat bolt upright. His eyes were wide open and looking fixedly at some point before him.

"Alice," said he in a voice strong and clear as if in conversation with some one at a little distance, "you understand, don't you? It was fair and square in the open, and man to man. I've paid the score!"

He fell back on the matting. Tom stood a while in silence, then tenderly closed the eyes of his friend.

CHAPTER XV

THE FALL OF A GIANT

THE wind was still high and the air full of salt spume flicked from the crests of the whitecaps and flung broadcast. The sea was rough; but the tail of the storm was passing, and the belated clouds were racing overhead toward the north as if to overtake the main body of the disturbance.

Tom had left Joey with Effingham and gone outside, feeling utterly miserable and alone. The birds, agitated by the storm, were calling to each other uneasily.

There is nothing on earth which will complete the sense of isolation to a lone man like the piping of birds on a bird island. He is in the midst of creatures utterly alien and unapproachable, and in time the association will drive him mad as it does the unfortunate creatures who herd sheep.

Somewhere, off in the darkness, Davison began to sing, "Not a Sparrow Falleth," but suddenly ceased as if a hand had been clapped over his mouth. The sound smote Tom with the desire of fellowship, even with these two graceless wretches.

What was he to do? They knew that he had the pearls, and if he remained aloof would not scruple to take them from him by any means whatever.

Of the twelve men who had come to the island there were now four left. And for every tragedy—the hastened death of Effingham and the slaying of Frawley and his men as well as the other fatalities—the pearls were responsible.

It was inconceivable that Frawley, the fastidious, had come to the island to delve for guano. Surely the pearls had taken their toll, and the remaining white men must be as disgusted with strife and butchery as he was himself.

It was time for a truce on any terms. There were pearls enough for them all, and to avoid any more discord of a violent nature it seemed best to offer Welsh and Davison a share as the only possible means of making life bearable for the time they must remain on this hateful island. So thinking, Tom fell asleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight. The storm had blown itself out and the sun was shining, half-way to the meridian. The wind had hauled around and the trade was back again, freshening the air like wine. Long lines of birds were filing off to the far north, their lines of flight spread out over the sea like the sticks of a fan.

Joey was boiling coffee over a stove made of an old oil-tin. Tom asked of Welsh and Davison.

"I don' know," said Joey. "I no see long time now. I think drunk."

Tom went to the door of the hut where they had been the night before, but it was empty. Several gin-bottles lay about on the floor. He had the oilskin pouch in his hand, swinging by the strand of fiber. The bright sun and the cool, stimulating trade wind had raised his spirits, and he walked on, circling the wreck of the *lanai* with its gruesome tenants.

He hallooed at the top of his voice several times. Then, from a point not far away, he heard an answering shout, but saw no one. He started to walk in the direction of the sound, thinking it odd that neither of the men appeared.

There was a sharp report. His brain had no more than time to record it, for something struck him like a blast, the sunlight became utter darkness and conscious life went out on the instant.

JOEY was kneeling beside him, kneading sensitive parts of his anatomy with a strong brown hand. He felt as if his head were an enormous thing, without substance, yet with something beating, beating upon it that caused exquisite anguish.

He put up his hand and felt a thick bandage that was sticky to the touch. He seemed to be burning up, tormented by the devil of thirst.

"Water, Joey!" said he thickly, and at once Joey put a cup to his lips.

He had never tasted anything so delicious. Joey's beautiful, melancholy black eyes were full of a tremendous concern.

"Tomi," said he, a break in his voice, "I been 'fraid. I been 'fraid you *maté* (dead). I 'fraid stop this place all 'lone."

"What happened?"

"They shoot! You fall, all same *maté*. I like kill 'um, but they take all guns last night. No got gun left. They all same

tiapolo **(devils). Now they go 'way; take boat; take all *kaukau* (food)."**

Tom sat up with a jerk.

"Gone?" he cried.

"They go now. Fix boat. They go before, only too much drunk. Take long time fix boat."

"Help me up, Joey!"

He stood, trembling for a while, his knees inclined to give way. Joey filled a tin cup with hot coffee, and after a time Tom gathered enough strength to walk.

Welsh and Davison had deliberately shot him from ambush. The bullet had struck him over the eye and glanced off, inflicting a shocking wound that missed snuffing out his life by the barest fraction of an inch. Although they had taken the other weapons, Tom found that they had overlooked his own revolver, which was still in his belt.

"Come on, Joey," said he; "we'll see about this!"

Their own boat was the only one left, for the one from the schooner had drifted off in the storm. It had been launched, and was riding a dozen yards from the shore. Davison stood in the stern, attempting to steady it with an oar—with poor success, for he was drunk and singing at the top of his voice. Tom caught the words—

"Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea."

Welsh, naked to the waist, was wading toward the boat with an armful of rifles which he tossed in, and returned to the beach, where he knelt and busied himself making a bundle of small odds and ends. Tom examined his revolver and assured himself that every chamber was loaded. Then, cold, implacable, his nerves set like steel, he walked toward the kneeling giant.

Davison with a shout dropped his oar and picked up a rifle. The bullet threw up a puff of sand, but Tom walked on without so much as a glance at the boat. Joey threw himself on the ground and began wriggling through the beach-grass toward the water.

Welsh started to his feet, and, seeing Tom, stood for a moment gaping. He looked at the boat, hesitated, then made for Tom with a curse. The weapons were evidently all in the boat, for Welsh was unarmed. His enormous chest was bare; and hanging there Tom saw the oilskin pouch.

Davison kept up a fusillade of rifle-bullets, loading and firing as fast as he could work the mechanism; but drink and the rocking boat spoiled his aim effectually, and the bullets did no more than plow up the sand.

So absorbed was he in this futile marksmanship that he did not see Joey, who had reached the shore in a wide circle, slip from a point of coral rock into deep water. He was still shooting when a brown arm hooked over the bow behind him and a lithe, glistening body slid over the gunwale into the boat.

The next instant a bare arm was twined around his neck with a strangling grip; he gasped and struggled to free himself, and, thrashing with arms and legs, lost his balance; his feet flew from under him, and with a splash the two bodies, intertwined, went over the side.

Tom held his cocked revolver at arm's length, took deliberate aim at the broad, hairy chest and pulled the trigger. He saw and heard the bullet strike; he saw the blood flow; but Welsh's jaw shut with a click and he came on, his lips drawn back from his set, yellow teeth.

Again Tom fired, and the bullet went home near the shoulder. A third shot struck the oilskin pouch and the flesh behind. The giant staggered. His jaw was dropped now, but he came on with a gurgling bellow deep in his throat, the blood welling from his mouth.

Two more shots went home. The man was streaming blood. There was a terrible fire in his wicked little eyes, and his face was distorted with insensate passion.

Something in Tom's nerve gave way at the monstrous vitality of the brute, and his last shot went wild. He flung the empty pistol, and it struck Welsh full in the face; but the next instant he was seized and swung bodily in the air above the giant's head.

Then he felt the great figure totter and sway beneath him. The huge muscles refused to respond. Welsh held him aloft, poised, for a moment, then slowly toppled over forward, and Tom fell on his back in the soft sand. It was the giant's last effort.

The fall had set Tom's head to throbbing again, and a stream of blood, escaping from beneath the bandage, ran into his eyes and blinded him. He wiped this away with his sleeve and set the bandage as tightly as possible. Welsh was lying on his face, stone dead.

Joey had brought the boat to shore and was calmly making it fast to a pole of the boat-shed with a long rope. There was no sign of Davison; but out in the bay, cutting the water in uneasy circles, was a procession of long, triangular fins.

Tom bent over the body of Welsh and removed the packet from his neck. The bullet had snipped away a finger's breadth of the covering, and what Tom saw made him gasp with amazement. He hastily opened the pouch, poured out the contents, and sat staring at them in a stupor of incredulous astonishment. They consisted of a double handful of smooth, round pebbles!

CHAPTER XVI

EFFINGHAM'S MESSAGES

JOEY brought food from the surf-boat and prepared a meal. When they had finished he took a pick and shovel and, unbidden, set himself industriously to digging. There was much to be done in disposing of the dead, and Joey toiled through the day with hardly a rest, for he had all the Polynesian dread of the unburied dead at night. Tom would have helped at the gruesome task, but found that the least effort set his head to spinning and the blood flowing from his wound.

He went to the little clearing by the spring and threw himself at full length, as Effingham had been wont to do. The act in itself reminded him of something—the sealed paper that the dying man had given him the night before. He took it from his pocket and spread it open. It was a note written with pencil in a neat, delicate hand, and read as follows:

My Dear Tommie:

It is a thing no living man has a right to worry about, for it is going to make mighty little difference to him, but I have a particular fancy to rest in a certain place when the gray shadows have drawn in close for the last time and sleep comes. You know the plot of soft grass near the spring where I have gone so often to commune with myself; well, I should like to rest there, and am asking you to attend to it if things go right with you and it so happens that you read this.

I have even taken a fancy for one particular spot (the whim of a very sick man) selected during certain morbid spells when my mind was on the inexorable future. On the round black rock over the spring is a white patch of lichen, and on a sandalwood-tree a dozen yards away you will find a blaze in the bark. Stretch a line from one to the other, and fifteen feet from the rock is the place I have chosen.

Tommie, I'm stepping off into the dark with no faith, no creed, and, I am afraid, no contrition. I have accomplished what I came to do and have only a vast curiosity to see what the rest is like. Yet if there are any presiding deities, as we are taught and try to believe, I trust they will help and guide you and bring you to your own.

Aloha Walter Effingham.

Tom choked as he read the message; then a flood of weakness overcame him, and he lay with his face in his arms on the green turf, and sobbed like a child. The letter was characteristic, not of Effingham, the abandoned stoic who viewed life with a jaundiced eye and a smile of derision, with whom he had sailed from Suva; but the man he had just learned to know, of purpose and principle, whose stoicism was a mere cloak for the fine sentiment underneath.

So strong had his personality been that in the familiar spot, with the letter in his hand, Tom could almost feel his presence. He carefully folded the letter and put it in his pocket. The two marks mentioned were distinct and unmistakable, and he saw them at a glance.

He sat there for hours, thinking, the pulses in his forehead throbbing and his head aching incessantly. Only three days before he had sat on this very spot arguing with his companions about the trusteeship of the pearls. Now they were all dead.

He was the last of these ill-assorted brethren of the beach, and he owed it to Effingham that he was not lying stark with the others. Effingham had understood! He had stood behind Matthews from first to last, and Tom owed him not only life but fortune.

But why had Effingham given him a packet of pebbles? That this was a hoax Tom could not conceive; it had been done with a deep purpose, and had a bearing on the enigmatical smile of the dying man and his remark about having guessed right.

Could he, with his weird intuition, have foreseen what had actually taken place? Tom tried to adjust his mind to follow Effingham's intricate reasoning, but it led him nowhere. He was certain, however, that the pearls would turn up at the proper time.

He sought out Joey and told him of Effingham's posthumous request, and together they prepared the body for burial. The pearls were not on Effingham's person, nor were they to be found in the hiding-place under the matting.

As they bore him to the spring the shadowy smile on the dead man's lips seemed to Tom to have the same intuitive understanding behind it that it had in life. Tom stretched the line, measured off the distance and broke the ground at the proper place.

Directly under the sod the pick struck a tin tobacco-box. Tom cleared it of earth, but laid it aside until he had finished his duty toward his friend. Then he sat down by the spring and with shaking fingers opened the box. The top was stuffed with bits of cloth; but underneath, glowing with soft, beautiful luster, lay the pearls. With them was a slip of paper with a brief note:

No. 1.

TOMMIE: Here find your property. You've already found the pebbles, of course. If Welsh got you, he only got pebbles for his trouble; if you got him you'll find these anyway.

If you're both on earth you can divide these or do what you please with them, but you've already learned by the time you read this that there's no use looking for a spark of soul, or even common humanity, where it can not exist. It's a waste of time and sympathy, and sometimes has fatal results.

At the bottom of the box was a packet, very neatly made of an old chamois tobacco-bag, faultlessly stitched with fine thread. In this were the four large pearls and another note:

No. 2.

I've tried to fix this all in decency and order so it will work out right in the end. Whatever disposal you make of the others, these four pearls are mine. I won them fairly without having to deal queer hands.

This is in the nature of a last will and testament, and I am bequeathing these to you, Tom Matthews, charging you to keep them for yourself, and, rather than let them pass into the hands of others on this island, to throw them into the sea.

Luck and happiness, Tom! May you come to your own again. This is my final word; and don't forget, when the time comes, about a woman and a man's weakness!

Talofa!

CHAPTER XVII

CAPTAIN WIGGINS BRINGS A MESSENGER

A WEEK later Tom sat kicking his heels against the summit of the cliff overhanging the sea on the windward side of the island. Tomorrow, or next day at most, he and Joey would put to sea. They would have gone before, but Tom had hung on with a faint hope that something might turn up. He had no chart or compass, and not even a general knowledge of the distribution or distance of the inhabited islands north of the line.

Wiggins was long overdue, and it was hardly probable that he would ever return. He was not the man to sail his schooner all the way from Honolulu, if Frawley had the charter for working the island, for the mere matter of taking off a handful of beachcomber workmen. Still, there was always the remote chance that he might come, or that some other vessel, possibly a gunboat or cruiser, would happen in and take them off.

Joey and he had carefully rehearsed a story to account for the disappearance of the others. This concerned an epidemic of sickness following the row with Frawley and his men, and Tom had polished and revised it and smoothed off the rough edges to make it entirely plausible.

The Frawley episode would have to go as it stood. Frawley had actually been the aggressor by firing the first shot, and Tom would have to take a chance on that against any story that the survivors on the schooner might tell.

They had cleared the beach of the last vestige of pearl-shell, sinking it far out in deep water, and Tom wore the pearls in a belt around his waist. There appeared nothing further to be done except put to sea and trust to luck. Somewhere to the north, Tom knew, was the lane of the ocean liners. Once in that they had a fair chance of being picked up.

The birds were all gone, and Tom missed their noisy chattering and bustle. The silence had become ghastly and unbearable. A dozen times a day Tom harked to a fancied hail from one of his late companions, and as often at night he awoke in a cold sweat from some nightmare of murder and violence.

Without Joey he thought he should have gone mad. The Kanaka boy was a jewel, faithful, kind and constantly cheerful, though Tom had often to suppress his tendency to dwell on rather grisly Polynesian superstitions concerning the dead.

They leaned upon each other for support like two children in the dark. As for Joey, with Kanaka simplicity he had transferred his allegiance to Tom, and would have followed him cheerfully to the ends of the earth like the faithful *Friday* of beloved legend.

A shadow fell athwart his face, and Tom looked up. Joey, tall and graceful, with a flower stuck rakishly over one ear, was standing behind him.

"Tomi," said he, pointing off to the northwest, "you look tarascope. I think 'nother *chipi* come!"

Tom could see nothing with his naked eye, but as he swept the horizon with the telescope there suddenly fell into the object-glass a couple of weather-beaten old square topsails. His heart leaped at the sight, but he held the glass on them a long time for fear it might be some ship passing at random. At the end of half an hour all doubts were settled. The schooner, running free, was bearing down on the island. Tom sprang to his feet and grasped Joey's hand.

"Joey, you old son-of-a-gun," he cried, "make a noise! Do something, man! Cheer, confound you! That's old man Wiggins!"

The schooner was bowling along with a fair wind and a bone in her teeth, but never had a vessel seemed to crawl so slowly over the face of the waters. They watched as long as they could in patience from the shore, and then, unable to bear the strain inactive, launched the surf-boat, made sail on her and went scooting off on a long slant to windward to meet the schooner.

It was late afternoon before they ran alongside and made fast under the vessel's lee. Sour old Captain Wiggins greeted Tom with more cordiality than he expected.

"I'm glad to see you, lad," said he, shaking hands. "We've been wondering all the voyage if we'd find you alive and kicking. I shouldn't wonder if the men had a few small bets on it."

"On me?" asked Tom in surprize. "What for?"

Wiggins chuckled.

"You'll find out soon enough, my lad. Where are the others?"

"Captain," said Tom gravely, "I'm sorry to have to tell you that there are no others. Joey and I are all that are left."

"What!" cried Wiggins. "What do ye mean, man? I left a dozen of ye. Has some cruiser been meddling, or—or— By thunder, I have it! Frawley's been making ye trouble. But where are they? What's been done? Speak out, man!"

"It's a long yarn, captain. I'll tell it in the cuddy when the anchor's down."

At this moment a woman stepped from the companion. She took a sweeping glance at the land ahead and turned to Wiggins.

"Why, captain," she said reproachfully, "we're nearly there, and you promised to call me when we sighted land. Why did you let me sleep so long?"

She looked long at the line of white beach.

"There are their houses," she said; "but where are they? There seems to be no one on the beach. What a lonely place!"

Tom stood as if turned to stone. Either his mind was wholly deranged or this was the Girl, standing there before him on the deck of Wiggins' schooner! She had not recognized him with his bandaged head, his pajamas and bearded face. For a moment he felt like sinking through the deck; then, straightening up, he stepped to her side.

"Dorothy!" said he.

She turned to him, startled, and drew back, her eyes wide with astonishment.

"Why—why—" she began.

Then recognition dawned in her eyes.

"Why, it's Tom—Tom Matthews!"

And the next instant she was sobbing on his shoulder.

* * *

"IF IT'S all the same to you, Miss Gardiner," said Captain Wiggins as they sat at tea in the cuddy, "I'd like to hear what Matthews 'as to say at once. It's a matter o' pretty important business, and you can 'ave all the time you want to talk afterward."

Dorothy sat close to Tom, and as he talked held his hand and kept her eyes, with a wistful expression, on his face. Joey had gone forward with the crew. Tom told his story as firmly and convincingly as possible, anxious to get the miserable business over and in dread of questions, while Wiggins sat blowing clouds of smoke at the skylight.

"And so," said he when Tom had done, "this man Frawley claimed to 'ave the charter, did 'e?"

He went to his room, brought out a rolled paper from a tin chart-case and spread it on the table.

"The man lied! There's the charter, right there! Frawley may 'ave 'ad a charter, but if 'e did 'e made it 'imself. The man served time for forgery once. The 'ole delay about this charter was because the British representative wasted a lot of time lookin' into Frawley's record. The man deserved all 'e got."

Wiggins went ashore in the surf-boat, Tom and Dorothy watching from the quarter-rail. Then they turned and faced each other for a long time without speaking. She looked earnestly at his drawn, weather-beaten face with its deep lines; the grimly set lips and brooding eyes, all souvenirs of his life on the beach. This was not the Tom Matthews she had known and cared for, but it was the one she had come many thousand miles to find.

"Oh, Tom, dear," she said, her eyes full of tears, "it has been so long, and you've changed so! But you'll come away now, won't you, boy—away from this awful place?"

"The sooner the better," said Tom emphatically; "but please tell me at once the miracle of you being here on Wiggins' dirty old tub. It doesn't seem real. I'll wake up presently and hear the birds screaming and find I've been dreaming."

"I came to find you, Tom. Oh, boy, can you ever forgive me for that horrid letter? It was too cruel—I was a fool! Say you'll try to forgive me, Tom, and I'll go back—Oh, boy, boy, I've wanted to find you so, and tell you——"

Tom, regardless of the grinning Kanaka crew and of an embarrassed cough from the mate, took her in his arms.

"But why? It was dear of you to come, but you could have written, you know——"

"Oh, no, no! I had to tell you myself. I—I wanted to!"

She dabbed at her eyes with a tiny handkerchief.

"Jack Holloway came and told me all about that yacht, Tom. He told the whole truth in a way to make me thoroughly ashamed of myself.

"I saw what a self-opinionated little prig I had been, and it hurt me worse to see myself as I really was than—than to write that letter. Then I wrote again and again, to humble myself if I could, but never got an answer.

"I wrote to people in Honolulu then and found you had disappeared, so I had notices put in the papers in California and China and Australia, but I didn't hear from them either till Aunt Margaret and I went to Honolulu, where I met Captain Wiggins. He told me where you were, and when I found out how much he cared for money it was easy to make him bring me as a passenger, and—here I am! It was an impulse, Tom. Poor Aunt Margaret had forgotten she was ill and had gone off with a party to the volcano, and I actually ran away. I'm so glad I found you, and—and you *will* try to forgive me, won't you, Tom?"

Tom took her in his arms again and kissed her. "We'll forget about that, dearie," said he gravely; "there may be other things you'll hear of that are not so easily forgiven!"

The next day Tom rowed Dorothy ashore in the dingey. He had not slept all night. How long would the devotion that had led Dorothy over so many miles to find him endure under the story he had to tell? She had come to him in his hour of loneliness and trouble. He loved her more than ever, and his heart melted at the sight of her.

He could not help but see that she loved him more than ever and had done well in not sending a mere self-abasing letter by Captain Wiggins; for it was the sight of her and the sound of her voice that drove all the rankling bitterness from his mind. Could he afford to jeopardize any future happiness by laying bare the horrors of that island and the hollowness of the last four years of his life? He had argued it out with himself, and toward morning arrived at his decision.

He led her to the little spring. He had placed a board at the head of Effingham's grave with a carefully carved inscription, the last paragraph a paraphrase of Whittier's beautiful poem:

To
WALTER EFFINGHAM
A Gentleman of England
This is erected in fond
memory and respect
by a friend.

"The Shadows o'er the Southern Sea
Have Deepened into Night."

Seated there, Tom told the wretched story from beginning to end. He did not spare himself, and yet somehow he did not find the telling so hard as he had expected. The plain facts, told in plain words, did not seem so degrading as he had been wont to feel them in his morbid brooding.

When he emptied the pearls from his belt into Dorothy's lap and showed her Effingham's letters he even found himself turning aside from his own story and growing eloquent in praise of the dead man. When he had done he sat silent for a time, awaiting her verdict. She rose and stood by Effingham's grave.

"He was a strange man, wasn't he?" she said. "I should like to have known him."

"He was a man I am proud to have called a friend," said Tom simply.

She laid her hand on his arm.

"Tom, dear, I know you are expecting me to pass some sort of judgment on you, but I can't do it. It has been a man's ordeal—things a woman has no right to construe or criticize. I think you have been tried by fire, and I think you're fine and strong and brave. When I wrote that awful letter to you, I was angry because I thought you weak and—and unmanly, like those others, and—it hurt me so! And oh, Tom dear, it has been so terrible here and you've suffered so much, and I—I sent you to it——"

She broke into hysterical sobbing.

"But, Dorothy," said Tom, "now that I've told you, do you still care——"

She threw her arms around his neck and nestled against his breast.

"Tom," she said softly, "I've come all this way to find you. I thought it was just to beg your forgiveness at first, but it was because I wanted you more than anything in the world. I've told you what I think, and I'm not fit to judge any further. Don't ask me to, and don't do anything but—but just love me!"

As they sat and talked, Tom saw the vista of a new life opening before his eyes. The sun, setting in a blazing riot of primary colors, touched the horizon, and with the haste of sunset in the tropics seemed to slide swiftly down behind the edge of the sea. Then hand in hand they walked down to the beach.

AFOOT

by Allen Lee Haase

CREAK-K goes a latigo,
Clink-k goes a concho,
Snap goes a tie-string
Supporting a poncho.

Chink-k goes a bridle chain,
Flap-p goes a fender,
"——" goes the range hand
A bit saddle tender.

Arrk-k goes a housing,
E-eek goes a rig,
Forty pound saddle
Doesn't look big.

Just try to carry one—
Stirrups of steel,
Keep on a-patting one
Down 'round the heel.

Dang every prairie dog,
Ground-gopher er mole;
Dang all th' watch-eyed broncs
'At step in a hole.

Dang all the boot-makers
Makin' high heels.
Wish they had my job
See how it feels.

The Ship Remembers

by

FRANK H SHAW

Author of "The Yacht Adventure," *"The Dude," etc.*

CAPTAIN MEADOWS slapped the teakwood rail heartily and withdrew his hand away from the wood with a sort of slow caress.

"She understands me, the old packet," he told the mate. "Just as I understand her. We've sort of grown up together. You take this from me, mister: there are some ships that have as much intelligence as—well, let's say a woman. Not that I know much about women, but they'd have to be clever to beat the old *Euryalus*."

The mate so far forgot the deference due to an older man's opinion as to laugh.

"Steel and wood and wire, that's a ship, sir. You can't expect things like that to feel anything."

The mate belonged to the younger, more materialistic school, which has satisfactorily abolished heaven and hell and kindred superstitions of the Middle Ages.

"Don't agree with you. I've seen this ship do things many a human being wasn't able to do. There was that time when we'd been working through a week of fog; never a glimmer of the sun. I was sure we were in deep water and safe, and I laid my course accordingly.

"The ship wouldn't answer her helm; she got as fretful as a horse. Refused to stay, sluggish in wearing—she was fidgety, fidgety. Tried to tell me I wasn't doing right if ever a ship did. And then one morning, we running with a strong breeze, the fog lifted a bit, and there we were heading straight in between the rocks. Had to clubhaul to get her clear—it was a narrow shave if you like. But the ship knew she was standing into danger. And there was another time——"

Captain Meadows was elderly and somewhat prone to rather tedious reminiscences which the mate endured with such patience as he might. But having heard these particular stories times without number, he cast about for some other subject of conversation, since the captain appeared determined to stay on deck; though by all the laws of the sea he should have been below indulging in the shipmaster's afternoon nap. The mate liked to express an opinion of his own on occasion.

"That's an ugly-looking beggar we shipped at Antofagasta, sir," he said as Meadows paused for breath. "Not the sort of chap you'd like to meet on a dark night in a lonely place.

He pointed with the stem of his pipe—it was Sunday afternoon—as a swarthy-faced individual, who, seated on the forward end of the starboard spare spar, was diligently washing clothes.

"Half a dago, isn't he? I wouldn't have signed him on if there'd been another man available."

"Shouldn't take a man on his face value, mister. And being a dago doesn't naturally mean that a man's wrong at heart. I've knocked about the world twice or three times as long as you, and the lowest-down swabs I've ever met have been our own countrymen gone wrong. But, as I was saying——"

He continued to reach back into ancient history until the mate was thoroughly wearied, until he deplored his subordinate position which compelled him to murmur agreement with the didactic old fool. The everlasting string upon which Meadows harped was the actual intelligence of his old ship—his own property from truck to keelson.

"I'd break my heart if I lost her; and I believe she'd break hers if I swallowed the anchor, mister. That's the real reason why I'm keeping at sea—because I'd be sorry for the old bakey to lose me."

Mentally the mate was of opinion that an ancient out-of-dater like Meadows would be far better ashore, spending his savings comfortably, and thus leaving steps for ambitious young men to climb. He was no sentimentalist, as he was often heard to remark; and this craze of the old skipper's for attributing entirely ridiculous qualities to a soulless fabric constructed by men's hands—and probably not too honest at that—was to him merely a sign and token that the old fool was deeply sunk in his dotage. He consequently found an opportunity to discover a bit of necessary work aloft, and summoned the clothes-washer.

"Hi, you!" he shouted. "You with the face! Nip up aloft there and seize on that topsail buntline block."

The man turned his face, looked aloft, scowled, and then arose leisurely with a bad grace. If there was one thing Captain Meadows insisted upon aboard ship it was implicit and rapid obedience to any command that was issued. He noted the reluctant movements with displeasure.

"When you're told to move—move," he bellowed, "or I'll find a way to make you. Get at your job!"

The sailor quickened his pace, muttering something about a fellow being hazed out of mere spite, and this being Sunday afternoon; but his remarks were inaudible to the pair on the poop.

"Insist on having your orders obeyed smartly," counseled Captain Meadows. "I can tell you, when I was mate I didn't tell a man twice to do a thing. If I lifted my voice above a whisper, things happened."

He would have said more, but that the mate made an excuse and left the poop to go forward.

Meadows looked up proudly at the piled pyramids of canvas that were rustling sweetly to the thrust of the good fair wind; he cast an appreciative eye along the trim, clean-swept decks that were as white as a hound's tooth. The ship, this happy Sabbath day, was a picture to fill the most critical eye, and again the old man stroked the teakwood rail.

"Aye, lass, you're a beauty, eh? Steel and wood and wire? That shows what a dandy young mate knows about things! You know me, old girl, and I know you. Honest to ——, I think you love me as much as I love you."

The ship curvetted a little at the moment, precisely like a horse that has been gentled. Meadows strolled aft to the wheel, and laid hold of the spokes.

"I'll take her a bit," he said. "Get you along and have a smoke-oh. Come back in quarter of an hour."

The man lurched away, groping for pipe and matches as he went, and disappeared into the forecastle.

Meadows often took the helm—it seemed to bring him closer to his beloved ship. He possessed the same instinct that belongs to a good horseman, who always prefers to take the reins himself rather than permit a hireling to drive. Now he dallied with the ship, laughing at the quick response the *Euryalus* made to his demands. She was unquestionably like a living, sentient thing this day—she pretended to be skittish, and slapped a little feather of sunkissed spray over her rail; she broke away from the restraining grip on the wheel and fought against the bits; then she sidled regretfully back to her course, and clamored along without deviating a hair from the set course.

Time after time old Meadows laughed at her and with her; time after time he fondled the spokes. It was very good to have a ship you could trust, and the old skipper rejoiced in the fulness of his life. At nights he was wont to pray that when the time came he and his ship might go together.

But Able Seaman Royaler had other views on that subject. He was a proud-spirited individual, who had nothing whatever to be proud of. His sole reason for signing-on aboard the *Euryalus* had been to avoid trouble with the Chilean police. There had been knives drawn in a tavern brawl, and a man had gone down, badly stabbed; therefore Able Seaman Royaler lit out as quickly as he could, and reached Antofagasta in the lumber-filled, seldom-used boat of a "dago" coasting-schooner. Being compelled to stow away aboard a "stinking dago" hurt his pride. He strongly resented discipline, and was somewhat given to whetting a long, ugly knife which he carried at his hip in deep-sea fashion. As he went aloft and performed the appointed task he thought bitterly of the rasp in Captain Meadows' voice.

"He'd better watch himself," he growled to the topsail clew. "I'm an ugly man to get across with. He'll find that out if he tries his hard-case packet tricks on with me."

Serenely unconscious of the enmity he had aroused, Meadows went below after the helmsman returned. He sat down in the saloon and lit a cigar—he belonged to the old school that prefers cigars to cigarets—and stared pridefully round his floating home, his hand caressing the velvet arm of his chair. Later he went to sleep.

WHEN the trouble came it came suddenly, without warning. Royaler was at the bottom of it, as was only natural. He was at the wheel and making an indifferent job of it; the ship was steering trickily as he had been informed by the man he relieved.

The mate paused from his steady pacing of the weather poop to mention that he had sailed in various ships with various men, but that he had never in all his born days seen a ship so grossly mishandled. "Watch her, you—you gardener!" he said, with adjectives to correspond.

"You try your hand at her yourself," snarled Royaler with an evil snap of his eyes. "Try her yourself, mister! There isn't a man livin' could make a better job of steerin' this old —— than I can."

His particular name for the *Euryalus* need not be mentioned here, but it was the nadir of foulness. That word reached Captain Meadows' ears just as he hove himself on deck through the companionway. And a curious, tremulous anger possessed him. He had newly awakened from a sleep in which he dreamed the ship had suddenly developed an actual soul.

He stumped aft, but the mate was there before him. Mr. Bunting towered over the recalcitrant steersman, and his face went brick red.

"You give me any of your slack jaw, my man, and I'll rough-house you till you don't know your wisdom teeth from breakfast-time," said Bunting.

"A fat lot of rough-housing you'll do," Royaler coughed, and his teeth showed in an evil snarl.

All his days he had resented discipline, and when angry there was a curious blackish-red cloud which settled on his brain and blinded his thinking powers. It had happened similarly that day in the Chilean drink-shop; it was happening now. He had boasted in the forecastle that no adjectived officer was ever going to "haze" him and go on feeling happy. He had a position to keep up, because one of his messmates was working in the mizzen rigging and overlooking all that was going on.

The mate caught him by the neck and dragged him away from the wheel as Captain Meadows arrived.

"Steady, steady!" chirped the old man, his white beard flying in the breeze. "I'll show you how to handle him!" But by this time the two men were wrestling together; Royaler threw out a leg and tripped Bunting; the pair crashed to the deck. Captain Meadows had never lacked pluck. He bent and caught the seaman under the armpits and lugged him upright. Royaler anticipated a joint attack and much punishment; his free hand went to his hip. The long, well-sharpened blade slid in and was withdrawn—smoking lightly, with a thin red film on its brightness.

"You hound!" said Meadows, and placed his hand on his breast.

He moved quietly away and looked at his fingers; they were red and wet. Then he suddenly sat down on the planking, and groped at the deck-seams with fingers that crooked convulsively. He coughed thickly, and looked wonderingly at Royaler, who was crouching behind the wheel with the still reeking knife advanced.

"You try it—that's all," said the seaman uglily.

That was all he said at the moment, because Mr. Bunting whipped a belaying-pin from the rail and threw it with some small skill. It took the murderer full in the forehead, and he collapsed as a pricked balloon might. But it was too late to help Captain Meadows, who without unseemly fuss rolled over on planking that was becoming sullied, and quietly died, stabbed clean through the heart by a man who knew his job.

Mr. Bunting rose to the emergency without a single thought of the advantage that accrued to himself through his senior's death. He shouted, and the watch came running; the man who had been working aloft slid down a backstay and ran to the joggling wheel. The *Euryalus* was curvetting wildly and running up into the wind; there was a thudding of canvas aloft, the rattle of loosened chains, as if the whole ship were protesting against the tragedy that had so swiftly been staged on her decks.

"Tell the carpenter to bring the irons along," said the mate, and was obeyed.

The half-unconscious Royaler was handcuffed securely by white-faced men, who stared morbidly at the still figure of Captain Meadows. Later the murderer was roughly conveyed to the foul-smelling forepeak, his hands were linked around a stout steel stanchion, the handcuffs were fastened again, and he was left to meditate on the mischance of fortune that had come his way.

CAPTAIN MEADOWS was quite dead, as the mate, who had seen death before, readily discovered. The second mate had no opinion to offer, but he was all for heaving Royaler overboard there and then, with a sackful of holystones lashed to his feet.

"We can't do that," said the mate. "The law runs at sea, just as ashore. But we'll keep him ironed up till we make port, and then hand him over to the authorities."

They later sewed up Meadows in a piece of fair white canvas, and committed his body to the deep in the fashion of the seas. During all this time the *Euryalus* made no sign of protest whatsoever; she behaved precisely as she had always behaved.

After the first sense of loss was over, Mr. Bunting commented on the fact. He had no evil to speak of the dead, but he thought it would lessen the weight of depression if he assumed a careless attitude towards the tragedy.

"He always said that if anything happened to him the ship would take notice of it and—well, I couldn't quite gather what he was driving at; but——"

"Why, a ship's just—well, a ship," said the second mate.

They carefully preserved Able Seaman Royaler, feeding him sparsely on flinty biscuits, until the unprotesting *Euryalus* reached port. There the man was handed over to the hands of justice. The trial came off fairly quickly, and it is possible Royaler would have been hanged, but for the evidence of that man who was working in the rigging at the time of the crime. The fact that Royaler had been provoked was skilfully used by his counsel; and when the death-sentence was pronounced it was accompanied by a strong recommendation to mercy. Later a reprieve was obtained, and Royaler was escorted to a remote penal settlement to serve the term of his natural life.

The *Euryalus* was sold in common with the rest of Captain Meadows' property, and resumed her lawful occasions afloat under another house-flag.

ROYALER stepped out from behind a bush and leaped like a tiger on the motorist's back, both lean, scarred hands encircling the astounded man's throat. He dragged him back into the undergrowth and released one hand sufficiently long to pick up an ugly, ragged stone.

When his victim was insensible the convict stood up and stripped off his telltale clothing. He worked adroitly, with many glances to right and left, but the yellow fog stood his friend, as it had befriended him in the first steps of his escape.

Two years of soul-killing hard labor had definitely disgusted him with discipline, and the escape had not been nearly so difficult as he had anticipated. As he stripped the insensible motorist, who had been so thoughtful as to examine his spark-plugs at that precise spot, Royaler wondered why he hadn't made his bid for freedom long before. It only meant killing a warder, scaling a wall or two, and hiding up in unsuspected holes and watercourses.

Anyway he was free now, and he would take extremely good care that he wasn't recaptured. Attired in rough and well-cut tweeds, he surveyed the car.

"Wish to —— I could drive you!" he said.

But motor driving is seldom included in the education of an able seaman; and he was reluctantly compelled to set the thought of a daredevil flight from his mind. But this new disguise was something in the shape of luck; and the fog was thickening.

He was hungry and very thirsty, and he took advantage of the blanketing gloom to make investigation. A refreshment-basket was forthcoming from the car; but a sudden dull thud that might have been a shot compelled the murderer to take more heed to his life than to his appetite. What he had already tasted of freedom was savory on the palate; he cursed blackly as he thought of the dreary monotony of personal existence.

His principal emotion as he set off away from the highroad with half a fowl in one hand and a wedge of brown bread in the other, was a feeling of resentment against Captain Meadows, who had caused him to commit a murder that was really unnecessary—and in circumstances that rendered capture a certainty. Royaler was not opposed to murder as murder, but he preferred to do it under favorable circumstances.

But in the mean time he was free—as free as the fog that swirled and eddied about him. And during the long, black hours in his cell, as during the long, terrible hours of his toiling, he had planned this escape in every detail.

The dry land was no friend to a man with blood on his hands and his soul; but the sea was different. Once let him get afloat and he would snap his fingers at all possibility of recapture. He remembered reading once on a time the story of a man who had not only made his escape by hiding in a ship, but who had also destroyed the entire ship's company when they discovered the murderer's identity.

"It's me for the sea—as quick as smoke," he said with his mouth full of unaccustomed delicacies.

That was the idea; either to stow away in some vessel's hold or else to sign on legitimately on an outward-bounder. It could be done if a man knew as much about the undercurrents of sea-life as Royaler did. True, discharges were necessary as a proof of a man's good faith; but—wasn't it possible either to drug or actually knock out a genuine sailorman, who was the simplest person in existence, and acquire all his papers and his identity?

Oh, no; Royaler had no fears on that score, now that he was free. The land was full of warnings and terrors; the soughing of a tree's branches in the light wind reminded him of the rustling of wind in a ship's sails; just as the *Euryalus'* sails had rustled on that day when——

He forced himself to set that memory aside because it created visions of old Meadows' blank stare as he clawed at the deck-seams, and bred up a sensation as if his diaphragm had turned to water within him. He was not at all sorry that he had committed the crime—he was acting in self-defense—and he spewed out black and bitter curses on his victim's soul; but it was just as well to try to forget the incident. Anyway he had quite enough to think about without that, considering the whole countryside would be up and about in search of him. —— the land, anyhow! Let him get afloat and he'd snap his fingers at all chance of recapture.

"I'm not goin' back to that perishin' ——," he said.

There was money in the clothing he had acquired—a good sum of money. But—once again a cold chill that was not bred of the fog assailed his inward parts—the money wasn't any blasted use. That stiff now that he'd deprived of his garments—the anathematized police would find him, and they might get from him a description of the clothes he was wearing at the time of the assault.

"—— fool not to scupper him, too," growled Royaler. "But one thing's certain, there ain't room enough ashore for me."

As he went along—the sailor in him enabling him to steer a definite course although the world was blinded by the fog—he reviewed his plans for freedom. The thing to do was to reach a seaport—a busy one for choice—and to select a ship that was on the point of sailing.

By midnight, he reflected, he could reach Rockmouth—a good place, the very moral of a place for his purpose. Better to wash out that idea of snaffling another man's papers, though—no need to run too many risks. He wasn't the man to spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar, not he!

Avoiding roads and houses as if they were plague-infected, he succeeded in reaching his destination without arousing suspicion. In a desperately low beer palace not far removed from the waterside he secured a rough-and-ready meal and sufficient rum to warm up that chilled portion of his frame which lay beneath his belt. He also treated the other occupant of the bar to copious libations; and on leaving borrowed his unknown friend's greatcoat and cap; both of a pronouncedly nautical cut. As he left a substantial tweed ulster and cap behind, he considered he was treating the snoring shellback with the utmost decency.

Snugly attired, exaggerating the roll of his gait, with the peaked cap pulled well down over his eyes, he betook himself to the waterside. It was growing late, but in certain quarters of the docks there was still a good deal of activity; men moved to and fro. The fog was thinning, though fog-horns blew weirdly from outside the port; in the nearer harbor bells clanged—much as the prison bells had clanged across the bleak moor after the warning gun had been fired.

Royaler cursed the prison fluently as he dragged his coat collar up about his ears, and gave a husky good-night to theconstable at the dock-gate. He breathed with greater freedom as the officer answered his remarks without any suggestion of suspicion. Apparently the alarm had not yet reached this port.

The keen scent of tide-water was good in his nostrils as he threaded his way in amongst the long lines of trucks that cluttered the many rails. The electric arc lights were blurred by the remnants of the fog, and a slashing rain was commencing to fall; but such discomfort was a trifle when compared with the other discomforts of two years past. Here and there steam-winches clattered and hissed; a big steamer blew down her boilers with a deafening clamor.

But too many people were working about the lighted steamers—far too many. There would be officers about, too—and on principle Royaler detested officers. Still, the stationary trucks afforded sufficient cover; and, lurking behind and amongst them, he gave a careful scrutiny to the possibilities of the situation. It must be remembered that the man was a sailor, and familiar with the fashions of ports. He moved after a while to the string-piece of a quay, and looked down at the sullen black water. The tide was making, and he estimated that it would be high water before dawn.

"That's a bit of all right," he said.

He looked up at the nearest steamer, at her bluff, purposeful bow, at her skimpy masts that towered away into yellowish uncertainty, and saw light glint on thin wires.

"Curse their blarsted wireless!"he said.

That was a matter to be taken into consideration though—a ship that was equipped with wireless was a danger in itself. It was more than possible, quite probable indeed, that a general wireless alarm would be sent out to all ships at sea, instructing those responsible for their welfare to maintain a vigilant lookout for an escaping criminal whose natural trade was the sea, and who might conceivably be expected to hive back to his customary environment. So the common-sense thing to do was to avoid a wireless-fitted ship. Only, the worst of it was that practically every steamer was so equipped in these go-ahead, utilitarian days.

"A wind-jammer—that's my mark," said Royaler. "Windjammers don't carry wireless; not much, they don't."

He skulked back behind the trucks as he heard footsteps advancing, and from this cover he searched the skyline. His heart gave a leap of relief as he made out, black against the gloom, the stately sparring of a sailing-ship. Treading delicately and avoiding the larger water-pools, he made his way toward that pleasurable sight. This part of dockland was quieter than the rest—no night work was going on. It was a perfectly easy matter to slink toward the motionless sailing-craft. A single well-smoked lamp burned at her gangway; there was also a glimmer of light in the forecastle scuttles; from that forecastle came a sound of maudlin singing, and one harsh voice threatening destruction to any who interfered with its owner.

Spite of the chill that beset him and the spatter of driven rain, Royaler chuckled. There are certain sounds that can not be mistaken by any one conversant with their meaning. This drowsing ship was due to sail almost at once—probably with the flood that morning.

"They've oiled themselves up pretty well," said Royaler, referring to the denizens of the forecastle.

To his certain belief the ship had signed on her outward-bound crew that day; the crew, as was customary, were instructed to be aboard by midnight—that certainly meant an early departure. Now no self-respecting crew ever stayed overnight aboard a windjammer in a home port if they could avoid it; on the night of arrival they promptly got money—either from the captain or from the tailors' runners, who were only too willing to advance it, scenting much ultimate gain. The day after arrival they were all paid off, as owners did not believe in employing men a minute longer than they could help. Therefore the argument was self-evident—the ship was due to sail, and she was a windjammer.

"A blarsted miracle, that's what I calls it," Royaler informed himself.

With a clear line of retreat ready to be utilized he lost something of his earlier breathless panic and took thought to the future. It was necessary to go to sea prepared for a spell of hiding. Sailing-ships, whilst offering many advantages also possessed disadvantages. They sometimes, for instance, kept their pilots aboard for days if they met with a foul wind, say. And stowaways, unwanted, were always sent back ashore if discovered before the pilot left. Consequently a man must supply himself with a sufficiency of food; and this Royaler proceeded to do.

He left the docks by another gate than that by which he had entered. He affected semi-intoxication, and jocularly invited the guarding constable, who was sheltering in his cubby-hole out of the slash of the increasing rain, to accompany him for a farewell drink.

"You'd best get aboard, my son," said the policeman after the most cursory of glances.

"A' right, ole son—just goin' get little soap an' matches," Royaler said, and stumbled out.

A belated eating-house threw unreal, ghostly lights across the wet pavement; he entered and purchased lavishly, still affecting intoxication. With his spoil parceled and beneath his arm he stumbled back whence he had come. A single truck was drawn up almost alongside the windjammer's gangway, and from the corner of this he watched his chance.

The singing and shouting in the forecastle died away. The night watchman, anathematizing the weather, took a walk along the deck, and returned to the gangway.

"Go into the galley, blarst you, where you belong!" grated Royaler; but the ship's custodian, wrapped in glimmering oilskins, remained where he was until a steady tread, accompanied by splashings, sounded.

Royaler slipped under the truck just in case of detection, and from this concealment watched the late-comer step over the gangway.

"Crew aboard, watchman?"

"Yes, sir—you'd ha' heard 'em if you'd been a bit earlier."

"Right. The pilot'll be along in a couple of hours. Give me a shout when he comes."

"Aye, aye, sir. Good night, sir."

Royaler hugged himself with delight in his amazing luck. This would be the mate, of course—he sounded genially disposed. And the ship was definitely outward bound—possibly for a three-months' passage. Now if only the watchman would cuddle down for his customary snooze in the galley——

The watchman stumped up and down the deck a time or two, until the light in the mate's cabin went out; then he slipped into the sea-kitchen, hooked the door and stirred the fire. Royaler waited a little longer before slipping inconspicuously aboard. He did not use the gangway—it was not really necessary, because the deep-laden ship floated low in the water, and her rail was just about level with the string-piece. He availed himself of the braces and bumpkins, and landed on the deck without a sound.

It was very dark, very, very dark; but he was sailor enough to be able to find his way about. He got away from the shoreward side as a first precaution, and then groped his way along the after-hatch. That was all securely battened down, as was only to be expected. He tried the main-hatch; that also was secure. But no ship, least of all a sailing-ship, ever left port with all her hatches fastened—there were spare ropes and other gear to be stowed away at the last minute—so the fore-hatch supplied his needs. One corner of the covering tarpaulins was loosely drawn over the hatch-covers; and it required only a little exertion on his part to lift the wooden plank beneath.

He slipped below, and breathed deeply as a man emerging from a dive might do. So far all was well; but his concealment was as yet far from complete. Also he made the discovery that he was tired; he yawned heavily as he felt about the cargo, which only partially filled the 'tween-decks.

"Gen'ral cargo," he said, touching bales and cases and casks. "Oughtn't to starve here-aboard. Down the pump-wells, though—that's the spot."

He had himself in a previous life taken part in the customary systematic search for stowaways; and the deeper down he got the better. He therefore wormed his way in amongst the stacked cases and bales, past the foremast, well aft, until he encountered the stout timber casing of the pump-wells. There was certain to be a loose plank—as always—and he found it. Once inside the stout box—it was nothing but a box—he crawled about until he discovered the insignificant hatch that led deeper, and he did not consider his work well done until he stood on the actual flooring of the lower hold. Down here it was stuffy; the smell was far from pleasant; but it was freedom and security. He ate a meal, coiled himself down, and went to sleep.

"I'LL be hanged if I know what's got hold of the ship," said Mr. Friendwell. "She's as refractory as a woman! Look at her!"

He jerked his chin disgustedly in the direction of the masthead.

"She won't steer and she won't stay—we've got a Jonah of sorts aboard," he added.

"It's the loading—these rotten shore stevedores don't know how to stow a ship nowadays," growled the captain. "It's all in the loading, mister. Take my word for that. Look at her last voyage—as sweet a ship as ever I've handled; as willing as a horse—you couldn't make a mistake with her. Once we get out into open water and the weather takes off, we'll alter her trim a bit."

There was no question about it; the *Euryalus* was behaving badly. The wind was blowing from almost dead ahead, and in the narrow waters it was necessary to tack very frequently; each time she went about she shook herself, she was lazy, she hung in irons and did everything that a ship should not do.

The newly joined crew called her by opprobrious names because of the extra work required in her handling; and they hinted darkly that Russian Finns were amongst the crew, or else some man had failed to pay his washerwoman. That, too, would account for the bad weather—heavy rains and a baffling fog, together with sudden unholy wind-squalls. They growled out prayers for a fair wind in order that, now they were away from the joys of port, they might get clear into open water, which meant easier times.

And whilst they growled and cursed and prayed the *Euryalus* slugged to northward and to southward sheepishly. She soured the tempers of all aboard her, and when the full weight of the gale came away in a boisterous squall that split the fore-topsail from head-rope to foot her people were thoroughly wearied out. So wearied, indeed, that the captain coiled himself down on the chart-room settee for a snooze, and promptly sank into a slumber that might have been death's twin. So weary that the forecastle lookout, folding his arms as he stood in the fork of the forestay, closed his eyes—"just to rest his eyelids a bit," as he explained to himself—and lost consciousness of his surroundings and his responsibilities. He, in common with his shipmates, had lost many valuable watches below, and during the hectic days ashore he had failed to coil away a reserve of sleep.

The second mate, who had the middle watch, folded his arms on that teakwood rail which Captain Meadows, deceased, had often caressed, and began to think about a girl at home.

The *Euryalus*, as if repenting of her previous fretfulness, was now ramping along in handsome style, with a heartening rumble of wind in her swollen canvas, with a vigorous flapping of cordage and the invigorating roar of parted and broken water all around and about.

"She's bucking up," thought the second mate, and yawned widely.

He determined to go and look at the compass very soon; but there was time enough yet. The skipper had left orders to be called at two o'clock. It must, Mr. Lorrimer decided, be getting on toward that hour now. After a while—he was perfectly certain he had been wide awake all the time—he went to the companionway and struck a match to look at the clock.

"——!" he said with a dropped jaw.

The hands pointed to a quarter to four! He would probably have said more; but at that moment the *Euryalus* ran her bows on a submerged rock, and the screech of torn steel filled the air, drowning all other sounds.

The violent shock hurled the captain to the floor, but he leaped up like a scalded cat and gained the open deck. He was too late to be of any real service—the *Euryalus* was done for. That was self-evident; there were no engines to keep her butted on to the rocks; she was already sliding clear, and the gurgle of rapidly inrushing water was added to other discomfiting sounds.

The carpenter, sketchily attired in a shirt and sea-boots, with a shore-going hat clapped on his head, sounded the wells, and reported water gaining fast. It was very dark, and there was a considerable amount of sea running; the wind was increasing in violence.

The captain made the best of a bad job—

the ship was done for, but it was his plain duty to save his crew's lives. Some one would suffer for this at a later date; meanwhile——

"Get those boats out—smart's the word!" he said. The men wasted no time. They worked like men possessed, but expertly nevertheless. A lead was dropped over to leeward, and a sufficient depth of water was found. The lee boats were got out. There was no time to provision them; but that was hardly necessary, for the smirr of fog lifted sufficiently to show certain vivid shore-lights.

"Hands abandon ship," ordered the captain, and was obeyed.

The *Euryalus* slid back a little farther and writhed convulsively.

THE first shock of impact awakened Able Seaman Royaler in his concealment in the pump wells; before he was sufficiently aroused to comprehend what was happening—for the close atmosphere, strongly impregnated with the heady scent of bilge-water, made for deep sleep—water was sluicing about him.

He had determined several hours ago that the time was almost ripe for his emergence from this durance—the ship was clear of the land, and making rapid headway to open sea. But he promised himself another few hours down there—though he had his story all made up and ready.

He forgot the story as he felt the ship strike again, and realized a sick heel about her. He gulped as he heard the rush of inward flowing water, and stood up—with water whirling about his knees.

"Got to get out of it, —— it!" he said, and groped about.

He believed he knew every stanchion down there, every knot-hole in the planking. He had slid down one stanchion when first he came aboard, and if he swarmed up it he would reach the trap hatch that communicated with the 'tween-decks and the open air later.

He had, however, somewhat lost his bearings; the rush of water was confusing; but his hands closed on a stanchion and he commenced to swarm up it. His sodden clothing proved a drag—the task was not so easy as it had hitherto been; but he persevered, and, reaching the top of the stanchion, felt for the hatchway. It was not there!

As he cursed below his breath the mainmast carried away, and the concussion of its fall shook him from his holding like a fly. He descended into deeper water, and then—he screamed. That water was breast-high.

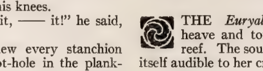
Madly now he searched again for a stanchion—the right stanchion; but he had lost his sense of direction. He found one and swarmed up it with a feeling as if a steel band were tightening about his chest. It was the same stanchion—there was a knothole he had felt in the deck before. He shrieked and descended—into water to his neck.

Up again he went, only to encounter solid timbers above him. His arms ached consumedly, and his brain was aflame; he gasped as terror clawed at his soul. But he was not for giving up—he fought now like a cornered rat. It was a case of climbing up—up, falling down, up again——

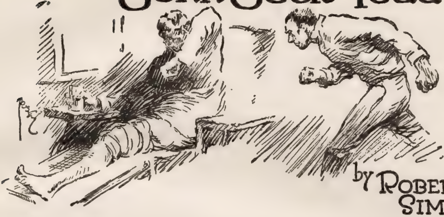
And then it became a case, as the water rose, of clinging with numbed fingers to the stanchion and howling out wild prayers that he might not descend again. The water rose terribly fast—even when clinging to the uppermost part of the stanchion it reached his knees. The quiver of the ship shook him clear again; and he was swimming, he was crowded up against the beams——

THE *Euryalus* gave a frenzied heave and tore herself clear of the reef. The sound of her sinking made itself audible to her crew in the boats.

"It might be my fancy," said the second mate, who was a bit of a dreamer at the best of times, "but it seemed to me as if the —— old hooker was chuckling. Didn't you hear?"



John Jock Todd



by Robert Simpson

Author of "Up-Stream," "The Goat-Man," etc.

"MR. TODD——"

Brock, who was Paller & Co.'s agent in Segwanga, settled himself more deeply and pompously in his chair and the corners of his sensual mouth drew down.

"—when I have guests to entertain——"

He stared stonily at John Todd, his junior assistant, and the firefly-dotted African darkness that lay beyond the veranda seemed to become deeper.

"—I am quite capable of entertaining them myself——"

Brock leaned forward a little as if to be sure that John heard and understood.

"—without any assistance from you."

John Todd regarded Brock through sleep-heavy lids, then glanced inquiringly at the clock on the trading-agent's desk. The hour was exactly 2:23 A. M. John was garbed in his pajamas and he had just been aroused from a deep and satisfying sleep by a black house-boy—or steward as they were designated on the Niger and Oil Rivers generally—and ordered to report in Brock's office at once. Since he was a slow thinker at any time—something like a steam-roller, unhurried but devastatingly sure—it took him some lengthy seconds to realize just why Brock had sent for him.

"You mean to say you woke me up at this time o' night just to tell me a thing like that!"

Brock reached for a tin of cigarets and lighted one without taking his attention away from his assistant.

"I'll wake you up," he said with bloated complacency, "any —— time I please."

John hesitated. A trading-factory on the Slave Coast of West Africa was not the old familiar counting-house of MacCreadie and Black's in Buchanan Street, Glasgow, and John had not been in Segwanga long enough to appreciate the difference. He had heard that trading-agents on the Oil Rivers were more autocratic than ship captains, that they treated their assistants as the most bombastic colonel of a regiment would never think of treating a subaltern, and the precise measure of their authority was not yet very clear to him. He would have to think it over.

"If that's all ye've got to say I'll go back to my bed," he compromised dourly.

Brock grunted.

"That's all. Get out of my office."

John's long jaw became still longer. He did not quite understand Brock's attitude, but he was reasonably sure that he was both unjust and insulting. And John Todd had a long memory.

"Just as you say."

He removed himself slowly and deliberately. A shade under six feet, rawboned and heavy of hand, he had placid brown eyes that looked out upon the world over unusually high cheek-bones as unwinkingly serious as any owl's. As he made his way back to his own room, which looked out upon that sinister shroud of mystery, the bush at the back of the beach, he was rather more serious than usual.

"John Jock Todd," copyright, 1922, by Robert Simpson.

That he was the son of Jock Todd of Abergowrie is of no importance except to emphasize the fact that, unlike his father, he was never called Jock. Jock is a fighting name. It is the fiery Scotch equivalent for the more peaceful and Biblical John and as a rule, though, of course, there are exceptions to prove it, it is earned by those who have made it their own.

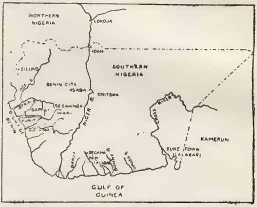
John had no ambition in that direction; not even now. However, when he lay down in bed again he did not sleep, but stared through the gauzy mosquito-curtains and painstakingly tried to justify Brock's conception of discipline. That was John Todd's way. He gave the trading-agent a scrupulously fair trial before he passed judgment upon him.

He knew that he had not interfered with the entertainment of any guest of Brock's within the forty-eight hours since he had arrived in Segwanga, and though he had, the previous evening, exchanged a few words with the skipper and chief engineer of the cargo-boat that had brought him up-river from Forcados, when they had come ashore to take dinner with Brock, he could not bring himself to consider that sufficient grounds for being awakened after two in the morning to be hauled over the coals for it.

As a matter of fact, he had put his finger upon Brock's only reason for so amazing an exhibition of authority. Brock liked to have his assistants receive an indelible impression of his importance as early in the game as possible.

Reluctantly, therefore, John was compelled, according to the evidence, to reach the conclusion that Brock had acted without any justification, that he had been brutal and insulting and that he was small and had an ugly disposition. Having thus decided all that was necessary to decide about Brock, John fell asleep again somewhat afraid that he was not going to like Segwanga very much.

ENTIRELY surrounded by the mangrove swamps of the Niger Delta, which forms a part of the more familiar Slave Coast and Oil Rivers territory, Segwanga is bounded on the north by the erstwhile ebony kingdom of Benin of most unpleasant memory, on the south by the equator, on the immediate west by a fairly broad off-shoot of the Niger known as Segwanga Creek, and on the east, from its galley—or kitchen—stairways, as far as one cares to go, by most of that part of Africa which lies between the Gulf of Guinea and the Indian Ocean.



Apart from the consulate where the Government in the person of a district commissioner presided, and the establishment maintained by the foreign mission society, Segwanga's business in life was trade; palm oil, palm-nut kernels, rubber, mahogany and ivory when it could get it. Seven firms had built trading-factories on the right bank of Segwanga Creek just below the Saganna curve, and the Government and the missionary society had followed suit.

The eighth firm of traders—Paller & Co. of Liverpool—had chosen to clear and solidify a site on the left bank of the creek, farther down than any of the others; and the God of his fathers was not good to John Todd when He sent him there.

Segwanga itself—meaning the upper right bank of the creek which he came to regard in time as a sort of elysium—was bad enough; anywhere in the Delta is bad for the white man; but the Paller beach was damned beyond redemption. A sun-flayed, tornado-battered, mosquito-ridden habitation, solidified and reclaimed from the swamps, trade did not come to the Paller factory as it did to the other seven on the opposite side of the creek. Perhaps it was really the *ju-ju* some people said it was; perhaps it was simply a matter of the wrong location; John was convinced, after a few weeks, that it was Brock or Ganson or both of them together.

Brock was a heavily built, sandy-haired man with pale blue eyes, thick lips and small ears that lay closely against his head.

He drank much straight brandy and said very little most of the time, and when his wrath mounted against the black man he used a hippo-hide thong in silence. His eyes became flat then, something like those of a hooked fish, and the only visible things about him that said anything at all on these occasions were the rippling muscles of his powerful forearm. Quite evidently they enjoyed the ugly business.

His senior assistant, or shop clerk, was a diminutive Cockney who answered doglike to the name of Ganson, which was always attended by an exclamation point when Brock used it. Ganson was a remnant. At some time in his rather misty career he had been a promising lightweight in professional circles, but that had been several years before John Todd met him. What John saw was a pasty-faced, sycophantic, button-eyed little man in a frayed shirt and dirty white drill trousers, the apologetic ensemble being crowned by a faded and battered sun-helmet that had served as an umbrella in more than one Delta tornado.

In the shop, however, Ganson was not at all apologetic. Sweltering in the pitiless grip of corrugated iron walls which retained the sun's terrific heat and generously passed it on to Ganson, he sold everything within the normal need of man, including imported coffins, and distributed promiscuous right hooks and the far-famed English jab for the edification of such of his Jakri and Sobo customers as annoyed him.

Ganson was often annoyed with those who did not know an upper-cut from a haymaker, and the less they knew the more annoyed he became. Even Brock, who had seen Ganson in action several times without saying anything about it, had known moments when he had been actually afraid of his shop clerk's wickedly fast left hand.

Brock was frankly of the genus brute; Ganson was just a far-off echo, and the swamps and the sun and the torpid isolation were more deadly than either. Between them they made John Todd acquainted with things that were not written in books.

* * *

LIKE every other trading-agent on the Slave Coast, Brock was known as the cap'n—a legacy from the old trading-ship days—just as the dining-room was called the saloon, the floor the deck, the kitchen the galley, and the clearing on which the factory or trading station was built was called the beach.

Brock, who had never captained anything more nautical than an eight-oared gig-boat, but who was gifted with a truly sublime sense of his authority and importance within the limits of the Paller beach, spent most of his time on a lounge in his office under the beneficence of a gently swinging punka. And when the brandy bottle was empty the punka-boy got it—if he did not duck quickly enough.

In the tropics the majority of men drink heavily or not at all; yet Brock was seldom visibly under the influence of the brandy he consumed. He never became voluble, never lost his stride nor quickened it, nor altered in any external feature except in the deepening flush that sometimes mantled his cheeks. When his mood changed it did so without haste and apparently without prejudice, but when he struck he struck cruelly and without warning.

Twice a day, in keeping with the custom of the country, he came in contact with his assistants on a footing of near-equality. That was at eleven o'clock lunch and seven o'clock dinner—quite formal affairs served in the saloon by a corps of stewards of Jakri and Kroo persuasion, under the direction of a Kroo-boy chief steward who was even more glumly uncommunicative and forbidding in appearance than Brock himself.

Not only on the Paller beach, but also on the majority of Niger and Oil Rivers trading-beaches, if there is any conversation at those meals the junior assistant is not expected to take any part in it unless the agent condescends to address a remark to him. He is there simply to eat and to listen and to appreciate the honor of being permitted to be there at all. The agents call it discipline and enjoy themselves; the assistants call it —— and vow to get even some day. But they never do. They either die or become agents themselves and, being human, help to perpetuate the system.

John Todd liked it. Because he did not care to talk to Brock upon any occasion, the arrangement suited him quite well. And Brock knew it and bothered about it as well as about everything John did or was or had. He did not like John's long, serious face, or his brown, solemn eyes, or his large hands and feet, or his accent or his silence or the way he went about his business. Sometimes he said so quite distinctly; more often he merely growled unintelligibly and allowed his junior assistant to assume that he was displeased.

John paid little or no attention in any case. He was Paller & Co.'s junior assistant and in his own mind there was nothing involved about what was expected of him. From 6 A. M. to 6 P. M., with a two-hour break between eleven and one, he was called upon to sweat and to become profane if he cared to, and to give of the blessed hours of his most fruitful years for four canned-food meals a day and a hundred pounds per annum.

So, in strict accordance with his conception of his duty to the contract he had signed in the Liverpool office, he received the palm oil and kernels from the Jakri and Sobo and Ijo traders who brought them there, paid out cargo from the general store or stores as barter for the produce he bought, kept the beach and the out-buildings upon it in ship-shape order and bossed the gang of Kroo-boys who did all the hard and dirty work.

There was nothing in his contract, however, that said anything about Brock. To him, Brock was just Brock, neither more nor less; and though John cannily admitted his authority he did not at any time subscribe to his method of asserting it.

ONE morning, standing on the oil wharf beside the hand crane, watching the steady stream of oil and kernel-laden canoes passing on their way to the up-river trading factories, only a scanty few of them coming to halt alongside the Paller beach breakwater, John heard Brock's cat-like step behind him. Like many big men of athletic mold, Brock was swift and sure and silent of foot.

"What are you standing there for?" Brock snapped. "Got nothing better to do than watch those —— canoes get away from us?"

John turned his head, surveyed Brock from under the wide, green-lined rim of his mushroom sun-helmet, then said mildly—

"If ye can suggest any way we can stop them goin' by, maybe——"

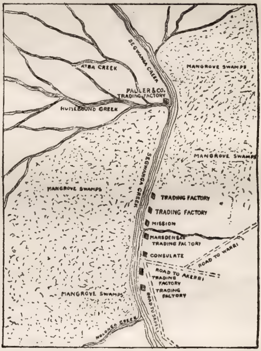
"Suggest! To you?" Brock laughed and the sound of it almost made sparks fly as it rasped its way through the heat-heavy morning air. "I don't suggest ways and means to my assistants, Mr. Todd. I tell them what to do and they do it. Get off the wharf."

"Just as you say," John agreed, and walked off the wharf into the oil yard.

"Todd!"

John stopped. Several Kroo-boys who were up to their waists in slimy water and mud, repairing the mangrove stick breakwater on either side of the oil wharf, looked up expectantly as Brock's voice lifted suddenly.

"Did ye want me?" John inquired placidly, going toward Brock again, mopping his face and forehead.


SEGWANGA CREEK
ATBA CREEK
MANGROVE SWAMPS
PALLER & CO. TRADING FACTORY
HUISEBOUND CREEK
MANGROVE SWAMPS
SEGWANGA CREEK
MANGROVE SWAMPS
TRADING FACTORY
TRADING FACTORY
MISSION
MARSDEN & CO TRADING FACTORY
CONSULATE
ROAD TO WARRI
ROAD TO AKERRI
TRADING FACTORY
TRADING FACTORY
MANGROVE SWAMPS
ROAD TO SAPELI
HOLONGA CREEK

"What are those boys supposed to be doing?" the agent asked gruffly.

"Mendin' the breakwater."

"I can see that without being told! Who gave you authority to spend the firm's money on breakwater sticks?"

"Nobody. You ordered the sticks yourself from Chief Ilori a week ago."

"And you received them without my O. K.?"

"I did. I thought that was——"

"You're not here to think. You're here to obey my orders, and I gave you no orders to receive those sticks."

"Oh, yes, you did."

"I told you to receive them without my O. K.?"

"You said nothing about your O. K. You

told me to receive the sticks when they were delivered and I did. They're good sticks."

"Bah! What do you know about sticks good or bad?"

"My faither is a forrester."

"Oh, —— you and your *faytherl*"

Brock turned impatiently to walk toward the pile of breakwater sticks, but halted abruptly and spun about when he heard John say quietly:

"That's easy done with your tongue and hurts nobody. But I wouldn't advise ye at any time to repeat it in my faither's hearin'."

"What do you mean? Am *I* to infer that *you* are——"

"Not that my faither needs me to defend him," John persisted with a most irritating lack of pugnacity. "He's a big man up and through and across—four inches better than six feet—and he's not like me."

Brock crossed the wharf in three strides and stopped a foot away from John, who did not move.

"Are you—threatening me?" Obviously he hoped John was.

"No, man, no. Nothing like that. I'm just sort o' suggesting that it isn't always wise to insult a man ye've never seen."

Brock's impulse was to strike because he felt foolish—a most unusual sensation for him on his own beach—but his hands remained passive as if some force other than mere restraint held them so. Perhaps it was that he suspected that John was not afraid of him, because as he stood there hating his assistant's long, serious face more than ever, knowing that he could beat it to a pulp without a great deal of trouble and that he would enjoy doing it, he saw no trace of fear in it—not even a sign that John cared whether he struck or not.

With a throaty exclamation of disgust and impatience that was intended to dismiss John as being unworthy of any further consideration, he turned toward the pile of breakwater sticks, ostensibly to examine them, but actually to take out some measure of his bottled-up wrath on the Kroo-boys.

"Here, you! Headman! Let me have a look at those sticks! Edge!"

The toe of his boot emphasized the order and, principally with boot and fist, he made an expert inspection of the whole pile, condemning about a dozen to save his face.

"Too short! Any fool with half an eye could see that! Throw 'em on one side! Not there, you bushman!"

His heavy fist crashed against a luckless Kroo-boy's jaw and when the boy fell, almost impaling himself upon the pointed end of the stick he was carrying, Brock kicked him till he got up again. John walked off the wharf then and went down to the kernel store. He had seen Brock do the same thing to Ganson once, and he sometimes vaguely pictured himself in a like position, but he had never taken the contingency seriously enough to decide what he would do if it happened.

Ganson had done nothing; snivelled a bit and limped into the privacy of his own room where he could become as vilely profane as he cared to at Brock's expense; then went down into the shop next morning and made the shop-boys and their customers acquainted with a few more jabs that had even more snap in them than usual. He continued to call Brock cap'n and listened, when the agent spoke, as if he were a god. Completely cowed by Brock's massive cruelties, he was too much of a brute in miniature himself ever to have gumption enough to throw off the yoke. To John, the little Cockney was just an unpleasant voice and few dropped aitches.

In the kernel store where kernel-brown lizards with red heads kept the place partially free of flies, John tried to forget both of them. It was shady and almost cool in there and though the aroma of sweating kernels was not the pleasantest in the world, it had the virtue of keeping Brock out.

Four large, round, twenty-eight bushel measures—somewhat oddly called coolers—that swung upon a frame, formed a dividing line between the stock of kernels on hand and the receiving end of the store where John sat upon a high stool before a higher desk and tried to make sure that he got what he paid for. Most of the time he did because John was a canny man who was not given to careless ways of doing business.

He was punctiliously careful, for instance, that the percentage of shell adhering to the kernels he bought did not exceed two and one-half per cent. The limit was five, but John thought half of that was better and assured of a safe margin in that direction, his principal anxiety thereafter was to be sure that the native trader, with or without the assistance of John's own kernel-boys, did not cheat him in the matter of the quantity delivered. It was a part of their unwritten creed to do so.

UPON a blazing Monday morning not long after the incident of the breakwater sticks there came into John's life a kernel-trader named Dawanna. He was a Sobo, black as coal, flat of face, full of strange gutturals and imbued with a persistent desire to refrain from learning to speak even pidgin English. But in spite of his weakness for a simple loin-cloth, in preference to the trailing Madras overcloth which custom and his position compelled him to wear, he was one of the biggest traders in the Segwanga district, and when he brought some of his trade to the Paller beach Brock opened a small bottle and Dawanna sucked champagne through his filed teeth as if it were square-face, while he dickered with the agent on the question of price.

His canoes, attended by his boys, hugged the breakwater, waiting to discharge their cargoes of heaped-up, glossy brown kernels, and when Dawanna came down from Brock's office, garbed only in a loin cloth, his overcloth slung over his shoulder, and tossed an order at his boys as one throws a bone to a dog, the work began. John's four cooler measures were filled, tipped over and emptied into stock several times that morning, because Dawanna's business brought smaller trade in its train, and John kept a careful tally of the number of coolers passed in by the Sobo on a pad that lay on his desk. His total when it was all over was nineteen coolers.

Dawanna's figures, however, did not agree with John's. The Sobo trader claimed that he had delivered twenty coolers, and when John refused to believe him and further refused to give him a "book" or check for more than nineteen coolers Dawanna cursed John's house in jaw-destroying Sobo and went up to see Brock about it.

"What's the trouble here!" Brock growled in John's ear about half a minute later, while Dawanna and his boys and some small-fry bushel-traders who knew exactly what the trouble was, looked on. "Can't you take in a handful of kernels without getting your feet twisted?"

Brock's face exhibited his dislike of John and the smell of sweating kernels in equal proportions, and some of the greasy, half-clothed blacks round about snickered. Brock wanted them to. He had succeeded that morning in buying more kernels than he had done in a month and it had put him into a more pompously blustering humor than he had enjoyed in many a day.

"My feet have nothing to do with it," John returned without a trace of humor. "There's my tally and I stand by it."

He handed Brock the pad upon his desk and the agent distinctly saw thereon the nineteen decisive strokes made by John's pen, each stroke representing the figure one. He saw, too, just how the kernels had been delivered and dumped into stock; sometimes two coolers at a time, sometimes three, and once all four cooler measures had been filled and emptied together.

"Must have missed one," Brock decided bruskly because he could afford to and because kernel shipments, when they reached Liverpool, owing to shrinkage and general loss, were often short of the tonnage shipped at Segwanga. "Make out——"

"I didn't miss one," John declared unemotionally from his high stool before the kernel desk.

"I say you did and that's enough for you! Make out a book for twenty coolers——"

"Nineteen by my tally."

"To —— with your tally! Make out a book for twenty coolers!"

John shook his head more in sorrow than in anger.

"I can't do that."

"You can't!" Brock looked at him and the Sobo and Jakri spectators looked at Brock. Though they did not understand everything he said they knew from experience what was coming even quicker than John did. "I'm running this beach and every living soul that's on it does what I tell him and does it quick. Make out that book!"

John hesitated a moment or two, then deliberately picked up his pen. When he opened the kernel check book Dawanna grinned and when he began to write Brock snorted importantly and looked about him to emphasize the fact that he was Brock.

To the native anything that is written is a book, whether it is a kernel check, a letter, a shipping-mark or a volume of Keats. He can not read any of them, so they all mean the same to him. But he knows the difference between the amount of "pay" he receives for one cooler of kernels and that which he gets for two. Which is ample knowledge for his purposes.

John wrote Dawanna's book very carefully and presently handed it to Brock who had intended to glance at it perfunctorily and turn it over to Dawanna with a flourish. Brock, however, did neither of these things. He looked twice at that kernel check and did not hand it to Dawanna at all. The check called for nineteen coolers.

"I'm afraid that's the best I can do," John said slowly, having first taken the precaution to get down from his high stool on the far side of the desk, so that the desk was between him and Brock. "If ye want to give him a book for another cooler on your own responsibility, that's another matter. But I can't put my ineetials on it."

Words sputtered upon Brock's lips and died there. He knew a blank wall when he came to it, and though Dawanna and his cohorts were not aware of it, he did some of the quickest thinking he had ever done in those few seconds as he crushed the kernel check in his ham-like hand.

Technically and strategically his position was bad. With a stub in the kernel check book showing the receipt of nineteen coolers, it was going to be very difficult to compel John to alter that record without giving him an enviable opportunity to involve the Liverpool office in the rumpus—a rumpus in which Brock would be on the wrong side of the fence because he was juggling with the firm's money while John was trying to protect its interests against the most brazen kind of theft.

There were many things which Brock did which did not interest the Liverpool office in the least. But this was not one of them.

Also, there was a desk between Brock and his lantern-jawed assistant, just then, and as John had, quite unintentionally, backed into a kernel shovel which lay upon the floor and had casually stooped to pick it up, the situation from Brock's standpoint became acute—well-nigh hopeless. Not that John made any sort of antagonistic demonstration with the shovel, because nothing was farther from his mind. He simply leaned upon it and, from an unbiased point of view, left the question of the disputed cooler entirely to Brock.

The agent looked at the crumpled kernel check again; then, in mongrel Sobo and Jakri, which John did not understand, he said deprecatingly to Dawanna and his colored audience generally.

"Long Face is empty in his head and his book hand writes like a catfish!"

He tore the check into small fragments and threw them with a large gesture at the woolly heads about him. "*I* make it right for you."

He went to the desk, opened the kernel check book again and wrote rapidly. When he handed the new check to Dawanna he invited him with flattering generosity to have another drink and left the store without so much as a glance at John who still stood leaning on the kernel shovel.

Presently John investigated what Brock had done, and found that the stub of the check calling for nineteen coolers had been canceled. Beneath it was another stub for twenty coolers, initialed by Brock. John shrugged his shoulders, closed the book and said and thought no more about it. It was Brock's responsibility if the next kernel shipment was short at Liverpool.

But the agent was not worrying about that. He knew that Dawanna had deliberately cheated him and simply because the Sobo's trade was worth it he had flattered him by allowing him to succeed in his thievery in the hope that he would come back again. That was just business, however doubtful its quality.

The thing that bothered Brock with daily, almost hourly, increasing force was John's very apparent determination to be right and to remain right in spite of everything he, Brock, could do to intimidate him.

Brock knew he would have to put a period upon the situation sooner or later; the only kind of period he knew or cared about, and on a certain Saturday afternoon when John asked him—which he had a perfect right to do—for the use of the gig-boat so that he could return a recent visit of several of the other trading assistants up-river, Brock caustically refused to let him have it, hoping that John would argue about it. John did not argue. He hired a canoe and had several of his Kroo-boys do the paddling.

FEVER-LADEN mists were rising from the swamps and the blazing heat of the day was blistering the tempers of all normal men when John departed. When he returned several hours later—after having listened without comment to some frankly blasphemous up-river opinions on Brock—the sun had dropped behind the drab-green wall of the bush, leaving a heavy, humid night behind it, and he found the agent on the gig-wharf, flickeringly outlined in the dark by the light of a hurricane lamp in the hand of a watch-boy.

The watch-boy was not accompanying Brock. He had come down to the wharf in answer to a lusty hail from John's Kroo-boys, to lend the light of his lantern to insure a safe landing.

Whether Brock was waiting for John or not was not immediately determined, because the agent ignored him when he landed. A cigaret drooped from a corner of Brock's mouth and the smoke spiraled lazily upward past his unblinking eyes, which, had John been able to see more clearly, he would have noted were a paler blue than usual and seemed to have no light in them.

John ignored Brock, too, and took his time about the business of mopping his forehead with a handkerchief a girl in Abergowrie had given him. He had been doubtful about accepting that handkerchief, particularly since it was silk, but he had finally taken it because his mother had said—

"The lassie'll be hurt awfu' bad if ye dinna, aifter her makin' siccan a bonny ineetial."

John admitted the initial was bonny; small and neat like the girl herself, and once or twice he had wondered if he would be committing himself if he were to ask her to send him her photograph. There was a space on the wall above the table in his room where it would just fit. But he had not done it yet.

"Which place canoe-man live?" he asked the watch-boy, referring to the canoe owner's present whereabouts.

"He live foh breakwater side, sah."

"Tell him to come get canoe. Two day pass I give him book for pay."

"Yessah," the watch-boy said obediently, and turned to trot off the wharf in the wake of the other Kroo-boys, who had already departed.

"Watch-boy!" Brock's voice came to life very suddenly, even if the rest of him did not move.

"Ye—yessah."

"Come here."

The watch-boy came shufflingly, trembling all over. John waited then, putting the Abergowrie girl's handkerchief back in the pocket of his shirt.

"Who told you to leave the wharf?" Brock asked when the watch-boy was within arm's length of him.

"Mas' Todd, sah, he say——"

"Did *I* tell you?"

"No-no, sah."

"Good. Tell the headman—I want him."

"Ye-yessah."

The watch-boy departed hurriedly and, somewhat like Bellerophon, proceeded to carry the message for his own "execution." John still waited. He had to. If the watch-boy got into trouble it would be his responsibility. John was afraid it was going to be a serious business, too, because there was no doubt in his mind about the action he would have to take if Brock persisted in being unpleasant. He eyed the agent up and down in a speculative way and, the gig-wharf being of no great size, there was less than six feet of space between them.

Be it remembered that John was not a fighter. If a situation were too big for him he left it alone or sought some means of going around it. Yet, thousands of miles from anything but a trace of civilization and on the Paller beach, of all places, where he was quite alone, he became convinced that the only thing to do under the circumstances was to turn Brock's rage against himself; to exasperate him so that he would give him, John, a sufficient reason for hitting him back. The mangrove swamps of the Niger Delta do queer things to the most unlikely of men.

"I'm chargin' the hire o' the canoe to general expense," he said by way of a beginning, and his accent was more pronounced even than usual. "I'll give ye the chit to O. K. on Monday."

Brock turned his head slowly. His face twitched as it might have done had a mosquito bitten him.

"Who gave you permission to leave the beach?" he asked tonelessly.

"You didn't, if that's what ye're in doubt about. Ganson wasn't goin' out, so I went, which I had a right to do. Nobody was using the gig, so I had a right to that, too. You wouldn't let me use it, so I hired a canoe."

"——!"

That was Ganson. John turned his head and saw the little Cockney coming toward them on rubber-soled shoes. He had been within hearing when Brock had put his question, and John's answer flabbergasted him.

"Ganson!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take Mr. Todd to his room and keep him there till I have time to attend to him."

"I think I'll wait here and see what's goin' to happen to that watch-boy," John said, and stayed where he was.

"Don't be a ruddy fool," Ganson advised as gruffly as he was able, but John removed the little Cockney's hand from his arm as if it were of no account.

"After the watch-boy's case is settled," he insisted irritatingly, then spoke directly at Brock. "If ye decide to flog him, as I know ye've decided already, ye'll have to have a wee talk wi' me about it first."

"You are defying my orders, Mr. Todd," Brock warned in his very best manner, which, as Ganson well knew, was always a danger signal. "We call that mutiny out here."

"And I'm goin' to prevent you from bein' a bigger brute than ye already are, and we call that charity here or anywhere. If ye have anything more to say to me about mutiny, I don't doubt but that the district commissioner will be willin' to hear it."

"—— you!"

"If ye like, man, if ye like. But only wi' your tongue. Put a hand on me an' it'll be the sorriest thing ye ever did."

Ganson laughed, but there was no joy in it. Brock's eyes became flat, colorless, and his heavy right hand drove for John's head with all the precision and force of a piston rod. And John dropped as men usually did when Brock hit them and hit them right.

But that was a long way from the end of it. It was only the beginning. John was dazed and dizzy and not a little sick. His head hung over the wharf's edge and he saw the lights on the cargo boat that lay opposite Marsden & Co.'s beach go around in circles, then pop up and down. Then some one was kicking him and some one else with a Cockney accent was saying "——! Oh, my ——!" quite often. The kicks hurt as Brock intended that they should and one of them did its best to stave in a rib.

So John slid from the wharf into the water, which was slimy and unpleasant but also wet and served to wake him up. He did not climb on to the wharf again. Though he heard Ganson nervously inquiring whether he could swim, he did not stop to alleviate the sycophantic Cockney's anxiety.

Under cover of the darkness he swam quietly around to the oil wharf, clambered on to it and headed stealthily, by way of the galley stairs, for "home." The blinking, uncertain lights of the up-river factories were a long way off; too long to be of any use to him or the watch-boy then. Yet there was a pitiless intensity of purpose in every water-soaked step he took. The little black house-boys—or stewards—preparing to serve dinner, were busy in the saloon, but he heeded their amazed stares not at all as he passed through it on his way to his own room.

In a few minutes, surprizingly few for him, he was dry and clothed again and on his way down to the beach, where, around one of the substantial posts that supported the kernel store awning, Brock and Ganson and the headman formed a vague cluster illuminated only by an inevitable hurricane lamp. The watch-boy was of the group, too, yet not of it. He was tied to the post.

John was dressed in his working-clothes; gray flannel trousers, somewhat oil-smeared and streaked with kernel dust, heavy soled shoes and the plainest kind of shirt. His jaw ached sullenly as a result of Brock's attack, but the swim he had indulged in had revived him completely.

He was not angry. Brock had struck him and kicked him when he was down. He was now, if he could, going to strike Brock rather harder than he had been struck which, from his point of view, was simple justice and common sense combined. He had no plan of battle. In fact the word battle did not occur to him at all. He was not a fighting man.

Also, in championing the watch-boy's cause he was not thinking of Wilberforce or *Uncle Tom* or of any one or anything like that. Had the watch-boy deserved a thrashing, as thieving, careless watch-boys sometimes do, he might not have witnessed the spectacle, because he did not approve of it, but interference with the course of justice, however crude and brutalizing it might be, would never have occurred to him. In this case, however . . . .

Evidently Brock and Ganson had no anxiety about him having been drowned. The headman had seen him slipping into the galley and had so informed Brock, who evinced no interest in the matter. However, when he heard John's heavy step on the gravel path leading from the house to the kernel store, he turned about and viewed his approach with lowering brows.

"Just in time, Mr. Todd," he said in a ponderous effort to be facetious, knowing at the same time that he would have to knock John down again. "We are just about to begin."

"So we are," John observed dryly.

BUT he did not strike Brock as Brock had struck him. With the flat of one great hand, before Brock had any kind of a chance to avoid it, he cuffed the agent with all his might on the left side of the head, and while Brock's head rocked as if he had been hit with a paddle-blade John cuffed him on the right side of the head to preserve the balance. Then Brock's natural instincts as a fighter overcame his surprize and, partly to avoid more punishment, but greatly to to put an end to such tomfoolery and take matters properly into his own hands, he closed in.

That was Brock's mistake. He should have backed away. But he was the bull type of fighter and liked to move forward at all times, crushing the other man, as a rule, by the pitiless ferocity of his attack; and in this case, when he needed a few seconds to clear his buzzing head, he did what ring-fighters only too frequently do. He clinched.

It was then that Ganson gasped aloud and the headman jabbered something like a ritual in Kroo, while the watch-boy, tied to the post, did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Dim shapes of canoes passing on their way up-river seemed to hesitate to witness the result of that conflict, and a somewhat bashful moon came out from behind a screen of lazily moving clouds and, throwing the encircling black wall of mangroves into high relief, shed more light upon the battle.

As Brock floundered in to wind his arms about John and rest a little while, John, very naturally, tried to push him away, and Brock had a momentary impression of colliding with the buffer of an engine. Just a huge hand—John's right—flat against his chest; that was all that happened, but John's raw-boned body standing on substantial and solidly planted feet was behind it, and a second later, the hand slipped up a little bit and long, hard, bony fingers fastened themselves about Brock's bull-throat.

Brock gurgled and tried at once to tear John's hand away, but John held on, slowly squeezing the breath of life out of the agent's huge body. He was not doing it angrily either; just methodically. Brock, then, tried to punch John away from him and John retaliated instantly by rattling Brock's head with a resounding cuff that made a noise like a pistol-shot. That was John's mistake. He should have been content to have gone on choking Brock, because the slap not only helped to loosen his grip on Brock's throat, but also made the agent go quite mad.

That he was mad with fear made no difference. Fear is often responsible for exhibitions of superhuman strength and courage, and when Brock literally tore his throat out of John's grip and leaped upon him and beat him savagely to earth with several wildly ferocious blows about the head and face, he was spending more strength than he could afford on a night like that, and was not using his head at all.

However, John was not a pugilist; he knew nothing about pugilism and could not take advantage of Brock's wildness. He tried simply to get his head clear and his mouth empty of blood before he got up again to stop Brock flogging that watch-boy.

Ganson did not help him any. No one did and he did not expect them to. The headman and the watch-boy were muttering to themselves and each other in Kroo and stood aghast at the spectacle of a "small-boy white man" daring to fight the cap'n.

The veranda of the house was lined with equally amazed house-boys called to the scene by Brock's quite audible shouts of pain and anger, and shuffling, naked feet coming from the direction of the Kroo-house indicated the presence of other spectators peering surreptitiously around corners, the whites of their eyes flickering in a background of black in a fair imitation of the firefly.

Then Brock was kicking John again, telling him with hoarsely profane insistence to get up, and the invitation concluding with a name John did not like, he did get up only to be almost immediately knocked down again. And again Brock kicked him, while the watch-boy whined and Ganson excitedly began to talk to ——. John spat blood, rolled away from Brock's cruel feet, wiped one good eye free of sweat and tried to scramble up once more to prevent Brock flogging the watch-boy. He was not conscious of any great pain; just a sickness in the pit of his stomach and a dizzy uncertainty as to the exact location of Brock's feet and fists.

Half-way up again, he found one of the agent's impassioned feet in his ribs. And when he had barely realized the force of that kick before Brock kicked him again, John thereupon did another very natural thing. He flung himself bodily at Brock's legs. The agent was quick, but he was not quick enough. John managed to get a grip upon Brock's right ankle with one hand and, the other hand coming instinctively to its mate's assistance, John hung on. He was glad he had on his working clothes.

Everything that happened then happened in a very few seconds. Brock tried to kick him and stamp upon him with his free foot but John, gripping the imprisoned ankle as if his life depended upon it—which it probably did—scurried on his stomach out of reach and made the agent squeal as his fingers bit twistingly into his flesh.

Then Brock tried to drag himself free but found that he had to drag John with him. He had no strength left for anything as strenuous as that, so he tried to stand as firmly as possible and tug the ankle out of John's huge-handed grip and, of course, had to lift the foot off the ground to do it.

John let him lift it and slid a little nearer. But he did not let Brock put the foot down again. In fact he helped Brock lift it farther than he intended and slid still nearer, pulling the leg up and out, compelling Brock to balance himself as best he could on one leg.

A fifth of a second later Brock shrieked in very palpable agony and called upon Ganson and the headman for help. But they did not stir; at least the headman did not and Ganson, not at all certain about what to do, was much too slow in acting to be of any use to Brock.

Having quickly shifted his grip—one hand at a time—from Brock's ankle to his toe and the back of his heel, John had twisted the agent's leg much as a washerwoman wrings out a wet sheet and with a final very determined twist and heave had hurled Brock's unbalanced hulk headlong away from him—not unlike the manner in which his father, Jock Todd of Abergowrie, tossed the caber.

BROCK came to a halt upon his face several yards away and John, instantly getting on his feet, rushed over to him so as to get a really good grip on the brute-man's throat. One of John's eyes was completely closed, his face was streaked with dirt and sweat and blood, but a whispering awe was all about him and it increased when Brock did not stir; at least not with any show of fight in his movements. The agent groaned, rolled painfully over on his back, tried to rise, then subsided again, the main difficulty being apparently in the right leg which John had twisted so assiduously.

" 'Ere! Chuck it!" Ganson remonstrated with John, who was doing no more than look at Brock just then. "You'll go to jug for this!"

"He kicked me when I was down," John remarked, breathing with some difficulty, "but I'm hopin' I'm not his kind." Then directly to the prostrate agent, who was swearing brutally through his clenched teeth: "What's the matter wi' ye? Are ye finished or are ye just shammin'? I've a sort o' notion ye'll take a lot o' watchin' yet, because ye're a dog, Brock, and it's just common justice that ye should be made to come to heel. Then we'll see the district commissioner about it. Why don't ye get up?"

Brock made no answer and did not move. He knew that his right knee was dislocated and that John Todd was responsible for it, but no thought of the district commissioner had occurred to him. The D. C. could give him no satisfaction. Only his naked hands could do that. He marked the presence of the shadowy spectators and made a careful mental note of the fact that the headman and Ganson had not come to his assistance. He would attend to them later, too, when he had finished with John Todd.

"Better chuck it, Todd, I'm tellin' yer," Ganson advised again nervously. "This 'ere ain't no joke."

"No, ye're right there, little man; it's far from a joke, and instead o' swearin' the way he's doin' he'd better, if he hasn't forgotten how, be prayin' to the Lord to forgive him for kickin' me when I was down, because it'll not do him a bit o' good to ask me. Are ye goin' to get up, Brock, or are ye done?"

Since Brock merely groaned and swore still more violently, John stepped away from him and, ordering the headman to have some of his boys carry the agent upstairs—if he needed carrying—he released the watch-boy who was tied to the post, told him to go about his business as usual and then walked off, betraying a slight limp.

No one interfered. The headman, because John was white, dared not, and Ganson was utterly incapable of coping with the situation. In another few minutes the beach was almost quiet again and John was conscientiously washing the blood and sweat of wrath from his body.

BROCK did not have to be carried to his rooms. Painfully and slowly, however, resenting the fact that he had to lean upon two of the most stalwart of his Kroo-boys, he made his way "on top," looking neither to right nor left. When Ganson, following upon the heels of his master like an obedient puppy, offered to help him, he gave no heed, but when the little Cockney timidly suggested sending for the district commissioner, Brock paused half-way up the stairs and looked back and down at his senior assistant who was a step or two in the rear.

"When I want the district commissioner, Mr. Ganson, I'll send for him."

And with just enough strength left to do it, he leaned all of his weight upon the supporting Kroo-boys, swung his left leg stiff from the hip and kicked Ganson quite neatly off the stairs. Then he went on again.

Ganson did not get up for quite a while in spite of the efforts of the Kroo-boy who ran to his assistance. At first he thought his breast-bone had caved in because Brock's heavy foot had kicked him there, knocking the scanty breath out of his trifling body. But presently, when the Kroo-boy had helped him to a seat on the stairs, he sat there for some time trying to realize that he was still alive and slowly nursed a waspish desire for revenge into a healthy state of animation that had to have an outlet somewhere.

Perhaps the spirit of John Todd entered into Ganson; or it may have been only the passion that rode the humid night, or just the fact that one of Brock's legs was obviously not itself. In any case, Ganson did not decide the matter hurriedly, nor did he enter Brock's room in a rampaging anger and proceed to mop the floor with what was left of the agent. He called upon the cap'n as he might have been expected to, quietly and servilely, and inquired again if there was anything he could do.

Brock was in his bedroom stretched out in a Madeira chair with the leg-rest in use. There was a pint glass of brandy in the glass-holder at his elbow. His right knee was badly swollen and was swathed in wet cloths till the doctor came. At that particular moment he was just sitting and waiting till he would be able to stand again. It might be a day or a week or a month, but whenever it was he would then tie John Todd to a post instead of the watch-boy and carve his name on John's white skin with a hippo-hide. He could almost do it, too.

"No. Nothing," he answered Ganson thickly. "Get out!"

A house-boy—Brock's own—on the other side of the bedroom door which Ganson had carefully closed, heard his master's voice and crept silently away again. He felt that intrusion at a time like that, for any reason, would not be wise.

"Why the 'ard feelin's, cap'n?" Ganson pleaded. "I couldn't 'elp yer, 'onest I couldn't. 'E grabbed 'old of yer leg and 'ung onter it, and bli' me if 'e didn't make yer 'op like you was standin' on 'ot bricks. Then when yer 'owled for me to come and 'elp yer, 'e tossed yer on yer ruddy 'ead like you was somethin' 'e didn't want. 'E ain't 'uman, 'e ain't! But that ain't no reason why we should 'ave a row. That didn't give you no cause for kickin' *me* down the ruddy stairs!"

"Get out!"

Brock tried to rise, but though he got his left foot on the floor, his right leg refused to follow so useless an impulse; and when Ganson was sure of that he went a little nearer, his mean, pasty little face twisting and twitching in suddenly revealed passion.

"You've booted me and given me —— for a year and a 'alf. Yer 'opped onter me the first minit I landed like I'd 'eard you 'ad a 'abit of doin' when a bloke was new, and you've treated me like a ruddy bush nigger ever since, because I ain't 'alf yer size nor 'alf yer weight. When I wanted ter 'elp yer comin 'up the stairs you booted me down 'em like I 'ad no more rights around 'ere than a mongrel pup. And now it's my turn, blarst your eyes! And I'm goin' ter mark yer so's it'll show, you——"

The rest of what Ganson said is not important. Brock's expression was much more interesting. It was not wrathful nor defiant nor calm. It was afraid. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he shrank from meeting the eye of a fellow man. He knew better than Ganson how helpless he was, how almost impossible it was for him to stand and how useless would be his defense, sitting in a chair, against Ganson's speed and knowledge.

And Ganson was still fast on his feet; lightning-fast with that terrible left jab of his which Brock had feared when he had seen it operating upon others, and he was small and hard to hit at any time. Brock knew all that; knew that the little man also knew it and would not scruple to take every advantage of his opportunity; and his flesh crawled away from the kind of punishment Ganson could inflict as it might have done from the threat of a branding-iron. Like any other brute of his type, Brock was a coward before the promise of a punch on the nose. Ganson hit him there many times.

"Get on yer feet, you blighter!"

Even as he spoke Ganson darted in, struck, and darted out again; and the snake-like speed and suddenness of the blow was more responsible for the whine that escaped Brock than the force of it. And when, a second later, with an effort born wholly of fear, he tried to struggle to his feet, Ganson feinted and slipped in—and out again—and a red trickle drooled out of a corner of Brock's mouth as he flopped whimperingly back into his chair.

It was not a fight. Simply a new form of inquisition; a deliberate, malicious torturing of Brock's huge pain-racked body by the only method Ganson knew anything about. He gave to the left jab of the squared circle a new significance, placing it alongside the thumb-screw and the boot.

The world beyond Brock's bedroom door and windows was ominously silent; dank and heavy and unresponsive to Brock's whining calls for help as the shifty little Cockney saw to it that the nasty work went on. Jab—a pause—jab—a pause—jab—a pause—jab—jab—jab—jab——

Brock's boy, in answer to his master's cries, came as far as the bedroom door but did not open it. He knew Ganson was in there, and Ganson's hands were like a *ju-ju*. They struck one on the nose and the eye and the belly and the jaw all at once, and Brock's boy had no desire to be hit in or on any of those places either at once or separately. The chief steward, to whom he told his troubles, felt the same way about it, so finally and quite naturally they went to John Todd, who was eating his dinner in his own room and enjoying the change. They told him that Ganson was killing the cap'n, and John, who had heard Brock's yells but had paid no attention to them because he did not imagine that Brock could possibly be yelling for him, went to inquire into the matter.

By that time Brock's face—but John's one good eye did not see it. Brock had buried it in the pillow behind him and, shielding his head with his arms as best he could, only an ear was left exposed. When Ganson began to punch that too, Brock began to cry. He was still crying and Ganson was still punching when John went in.

"What are ye doin' ye little rat? Here! Stop it! You'll knock that ear away from his head if ye——"

"Don't let him hit me! Don't let him hit me again!" came the mumbling wail from the pillow; and John knew then that there was no fight left in Brock's body or his soul.

Ganson stopped. He could not help himself. John's great right hand was about his thin neck and, as if he were of no more consequence than a dirty towel, John flung him against the opposite wall with a force that knocked most of the venom out of his system. Ere he could recover from the shock, John gripped him by the neck again and compelling him to stand upright, shook him till his teeth rattled.

"What do ye mean by it? Hittin' a helpless man like that? Are ye daft?"

"Don't let him hit me!" Brock whimpered again into the pillow. "Don't let him——"

"Oh, you hold your tongue, you big, blubberin' bairn!"

Brock obeyed instantly. Ganson's arms hung limply at his sides. His legs were weaving under him, his face was like chalk and perspiration streamed from him like rain.

"I marked 'im! I marked the blighter. 'E's a mess, that's what—just a ruddy mess!"

John took Ganson's word for it. He tightened his hold upon the little Cockney's neck and said dryly:

"Come wi' me, little man, and I'll put ye to your bed. That'll be the safest place for you, I'm thinkin', because I'm afraid ye've got a vicious disposeetion."

And, much as if he were trailing a sack behind him, he dragged Ganson from the room.

JOHN went up-river again that night, this time in the gig, only to find that the story of the manner in which he had brought about Brock's downfall had preceded him. Half-way to the district commissioner's, whither he was bound, he was met by a gigful of traders' assistants who were going down to the Paller beach to find out if there was any truth in the later story that Ganson had killed the agent.

John told them solemnly that there was not, and though they seemed disappointed about it, they turned and went back with him to hear him tell Daniel Dane Parker, the D. C., his version of the whole business. Which he did and later proved every word of it to the D. C.'s complete satisfaction. So that Brock was quietly but officially removed from the country and John, for a time, ran the Paller factory alone until the Liverpool office sent him an assistant or two. It was thought best to invalid Ganson home because his heart was bad.

But the thing that sticks in John's crop is the fact that when he had finished telling his story to the D. C., a compatriot of his, meeting him on the way to the consulate gig-wharf, greeted him most familiarly with:

"Hullo, Jock. What's this I've been hearin' about ye?"

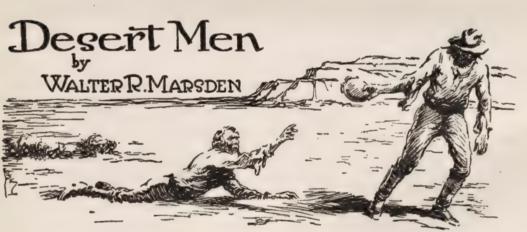
Because, as John was careful to explain to the girl in Abergowrie when, nearly two years later, he asked her by word of mouth to let him take her photograph back to the coast with him:

"That name may fit my faither, but it doesn't fit me. You know fine, Bella, that I'm not a fightin' man."

Desert Men

by

WALTER R. MARSDEN



THE two men broke into a shambling run. One of them unhooked the canteen from his belt and forged a bit ahead of the other. At the brink of the small declivity he stopped; an agonized cry came through his parched lips.

"O God!" he groaned. "Jim, it's dry!"

Jim came up beside him. He looked down at the waterless water-hole. The other man was exhibiting signs of panic. With a sidelong glance at him, Jim remarked—

"Kinda looks that way, don't it?"

The other hurled the now useless canteen to the ground and began to curse the Deity he had a moment before invoked. His action suggested the blind frenzy of despair. Jim looked at his partner steadily.

"Save yer breath, Bob." He spoke in a low, even tone that checked the other's mad outburst. "Better drop yer gun too; extra weight."

He let his own cartridge belt and holster drop by way of example, but Bob did not follow suit. Instead, at the mention of the word "gun," a wild look crept into his eyes. Jim saw and acted quickly.

"No, you don't," he said, yanking Bob's weapon from its sheath and flinging it as far as he was able. "Bob, old man, ketch hold on yerself. We're livin' yet, ain't we? We still got some chance o' gettin' through.

It's a cinch we ain't the only rats out'n this here desert; we're liable to pick up with somebody who's got water to spare, 'n——"

"No chance," muttered Bob, "we're as good as dead already."

"Aw, cut it! Then we gotta make Bedrock. We c'n do it by goin' steady. C'mon; git goin'; we wasted too much time now." Jim started off in the direction of the small town of Bedrock, their only hope. Bob shuffled after him.

With hat brims pulled down to shade their eyes and heads bent forward the two men walked in an inferno. Not a vestige of shade anywhere; the trackless waste afforded not an inch of shelter from the merciless sun that beat down upon them from a coppery sky; the heat devils danced and whirled around them. Yet they went on, because one was fired by the desire to live and possessed the strength of will to drive the other.

It was hell! Step, step, step, until walking became automatic. A burning thirst precluded other suffering, their parched throats and caked lips cried insistently for water. As if in punishment for Bob's blasphemy the sun shone with a terrible brilliance. And, by an irony of fate, Jim's canteen hung, unnoticed, at his side. Neither spoke; there was no need for conversation. When Bob faltered in his stride, Jim grasped him by the arm and urged him on. And still they went plodding on. How long, Jim asked himself, would the fight continue?

All the rest of that day they fought their way step by tortuous step across the blazing sand. To Jim the struggle for life became an obsession; in his semi-delirium he fancied the sun a living enemy. He shook his fist at it, tried to swear at it, and dragged Bob with him to defeat its efforts to kill them.

WITH evening came a slight measure of relief. They flung their aching bodies to the cooling sand to rest. When they had lain there for some time Jim turned to rise. In the movement he felt the canteen at his side, snatched it eagerly and shook it. The hope that had started in his breast died when no gurgle came to his ear; in his feverish state he'd forgotten that the thing had been emptied. He dropped it beside his partner who lay outstretched with his eyes closed. Then, the nucleus of a wild idea germinating in his brain, he snatched it up again and returned it to the hook on his belt. It took a good deal of effort to kick Bob to his feet, but Jim succeeded after renewed attempts, and off they started again on their weary march.

Had any one ever accused Jim Coulter of being a psychologist he would have answered, "I don't sabe Greek. What's it in ord'nary lingo?" Yet the crazy scheme he turned over in his mind would have been worthy of a scientist. No student of "mind over matter" was Jim, however; so we'll say that Providence suggested the plan to him and let it go at that.

With the dawn of the next day Bob sank down without a word and stubbornly refused to move and Jim dropped to the sand beside him to gather what little strength he had in reserve. After a short time he crawled to his feet and unhooked the canteen from his belt. Then he bent over the prostrate form of his partner and shook him. When Bob looked up at him he held the canteen up to his lips and pretended to drink from it. At this Bob's eyes grew wide.

He raised himself on one hand and held out the other; his jaw dropped in amazement when Jim, forcing a grin through the alkali dust on his face, shook his head and turned away. Bob tried to speak, but no sound issued from his throat. The word "water" formed on his lips. Jim had water; Jim had water; Jim had water!

The thought burned into his brain with insistence; he got drunkenly to his feet and staggered after him. The mad race had begun!

Jim turned and held the canteen to his lips again, tauntingly. A horrible scream forced its rasping way up from Bob's throat; he tried to run forward and fell. He got up again and lurched after Jim who had water, water; Jim had water and wouldn't give him any! Jim realized now that he had created a raving Frankenstein monster that threatened to destroy him. He hooked the canteen to his belt and did not turn again.

OVER the hill that hides the town of Bedrock from the expanse of the great desert two grizzled old prospectors urged their flea-bitten burros. As they stopped at the brow of the ascent to wipe their perspiring faces one of them dropped his bandanna.

"Jumpin' horse-flies!" he yelled. "Look, Dusty!"

Dusty, following with his eyes the direction indicated by the other's outstretched arm, beheld the figure of a man crawling, followed at a distance of about twenty feet by another who staggered drunkenly. Both old men started down the other side of the hill at a dead run. They reached the pair just in time to prevent the second fellow, who had caught up with the other, from falling upon him.

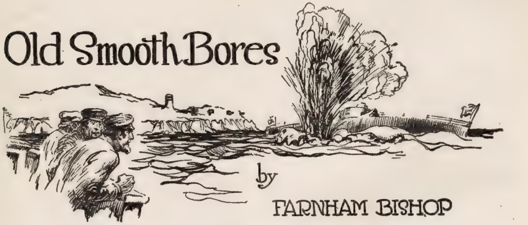
Despite his apparent weakened condition, the man seemed endowed with the strength of a maniac and presented a tough problem which Dusty solved by tapping him on the head with the butt of his Colt. They then turned their attentions to the other who still showed signs of life. On his belt was a canteen which they found to be empty.

"Here, Samuel," said Dusty to the other, "you take the water bag an' 'tend to 'em while I beat it back to town fer help."

It took some time and careful nursing to bring Bob back to his health and normal mentality, but a doctor who had been imported from a more modern town than Bedrock accomplished this successfully. Once he had regained control of his reasoning, Bob was not long in coming to the realization of what his partner had done for him. After their burros had strayed away from them during the sand-storm that had buried their water-bags, Jim's canteen had been emptied first, and there remained only the obvious conclusion that Jim had literally taunted him into saving himself. When Jim, hearing that his friend was convalescent, came to see him Bob had tears in his eyes.

"Jim, old-timer," he said after they shook hands, "I'm gonna give you my share in the mine. You saved my worthless carcass an' that's the least I can do."

"Like —— you are! Listen, Bob," Jim added when he saw the protest forming on his lips, "how in blazes do you think I could 'a' got through if I didn't have you a-tearin' after me ready to chaw me up?"



Old Smooth Bores

by

FARNHAM BISHOP

Author of "The Deacon's Seventy-four," "Yankee Tricks," etc.

"OH, LORD, they're at it again!" A deep chorus of groans went up from the group of Americans and Englishmen on the galley of the "Confederate Consulate" at Puerto Velasco, that frowzy little seaport of the frowzy little Republic of Equatan.

"Come on, you chaps, let's go over to the Central," said Murray, the British consul. "No use staying here."

"I should say not," indorsed Bogardus of the Ferrocarril Nacional with a disgusted oath. "And the drinks are on you, Grimshaw. What in tropical Tophet did you do it for?"

"Do what?" asked the bewildered young mining engineer, who was new to the country. "What on earth do you mean?"

"American Civil War has started again, that's all," drawled Murray. "Can't you hear it raging?"

He jerked his head toward the far end of the long veranda, where the only two men had not risen with the rest were sitting bolt-upright on the edges of their chairs and glaring into each other's faces while they argued furiously. As both were talking at the same time and at the top of their voices, Grimshaw could only catch disjointed fragments:

"Hampton Roads—rip-raps—busted her wide open—unroofed his pilot-house, suh—'leven - inch shells—reduced charges—Worden—Buchanan—Catesby ap Jones!"

"The opening chorus," said the railroad man wearily. "They'll calm down after a while and sing the same old solos and responses back and forth all night. Come on, Grimshaw, what are you waiting for?"

"To say good night to our host," answered the young man stiffly.

"Quite right," approved the Englishman. "But really you're not offending him by going away like this. In fact, he'll hunt you up tomorrow and apologize profusely for forgetting himself—and next time it will be the same thing over again. We're used to it, here in Puerto Velasco.

"Captain Tyler and Captain Holcomb are two of the sanest and most courteous gentlemen alive until some one makes the error of referring to the naval operations of your late Civil War. Then they go quite mad, just like that."

"And the man who is guilty of starting them off is fined a round of drinks for the crowd," explained Bogardus. "For this is the best loafing-place in town, but nobody wants to stay here after the old smooth bores start firing. Come on over to the Central, Grimshaw, and set 'em up."

Grimshaw followed obediently, but turned as they reached the steps for a parting look at the two old sea captains. Deep in argument and entirely unaware of his going, they made a picturesque pair as they sat there in the bright tropic moonlight. Both were middle-sized, middle-aged men in clean white duck but otherwise different in every detail.

Captain Ezra Holcomb, skipper and owner of the *Hattie Holcomb*, was a short, thick man with a short, thick beard and a clean-shaven upper lip. The squareness of his lines was emphasized by his rigidly starched and ironed duck trousers and double-breasted coat, as spotless as the *Hattie Holcomb's* deck and with every brass button shining as bright work should. He came of a long line of New England seamen and had held a temporary commission as lieutenant-commander under Farragut in the Civil War.

Captain Zeb Tyler, C. S. N., had apparently served as everything from gunner's mate on the *Merrimac* to handy man for the Confederate Torpedo Service. He hated uniforms and detested starch. His shirts and white suits were soft and shapeless, and he wore an old-time planter's palm-leaf hat with a wide brim and low, round crown. He was long and lean and seemed much older than Ezra Holcomb, for while the latter's beard was a grizzled brown, Zeb Tyler's long mustache and goatee were snowy white.

"Why do they call him the Confederate Consul?" asked Grimshaw, as he and the other two walked toward the Hotel Central.

"Because he keeps the Stars and Bars flying from that staff in front of his house, like the flag on a regular consulate. Most of the natives think he is a real consul and respect him accordingly. He came down here in 'sixty-six because he wouldn't take the oath of allegiance to the United States, and he's lived here ever since," explained Bogardus.

"Fancy living fifteen years in this filthy fever-hole," said the Englishman with a shudder. "Don't you think he'll chuck it and go back to the States some day?"

"Not unless they turn the clock back to 1861," declared Bogardus. "He doesn't even know that it's 1881 now."

They entered the crowded Central bar, where Grimshaw did his duty.

"And now," he demanded, "will some gentleman kindly tell me what it was I said that broke up the party?"

"You asked what sort of a warship the *Patria* was," answered Murray. "Fatal question, that. Captain Holcomb promptly replied, 'A Civil War monitor,' and that last word was a red rag to Captain Tyler. Our friend the Confederate Consul firmly believes that the *Merrimac* whipped the *Monitor* and that the Southern Navy was on the point of winning the war when Lee's army unaccountably surrendered."

"I remember now," said Grimshaw. "I asked because I was wondering whether the *Patria* would be able to run past the forts and into the harbor in case Admiral Flores is really sending her up the coast to squeeze money and supplies out of

Velasco. Do you think that gold-laced pirate will do anything of the kind?"

"I rather fear so," said the British consul. "You see, I was down on the West Coast in 'seventy-seven, when the Peruvian ironclad *Huascar* went on the loose and buccaneered all over the shop. Her crew of merry mutineers bagged no end of plunder out of some of the coast towns and bombarded those that wouldn't pay. They finally had the impudence to stop and rob English steamers on the high seas.

"When our minister protested, the Peruvian Government disclaimed all responsibility, just as Equatan has done since its own navy has started another one of these floating revolutions. Two of our cruisers put out after the *Huascar* and ran her down in Ylo Bay.

"She showed fight, and they found her rather an awkward customer, for she was an armored ship and they were not. But they gave her such a dusting that her crew were glad to surrender to their own people next day. And instead of thanking us for putting a stop to the piracy, the Peruvians were loudly indignant because we had fired on her. Rather quaint, what?"

"All of that," agreed Grimshaw. "But who's to put a stop to Admiral Flores if he starts playing that game around here? He has the whole Equatan navy with him, and the forts are as old as the fleet is modern. And there's no cable nor any American or English warships anywhere within reach.

"Suppose the *Patria* or the big *Conquistador* started to shoot up Puerto Velasco? I'm interested because I've got about twenty tons of dynamite and rackarock piled up on the railroad pier where it was lightered ashore from the *Hattie Holcomb* yesterday. One shell in the middle of that consignment wouldn't leave much of the waterfront.

"As soon as I heard the rumor that a Florista ironclad was coming, I went to our consulate to see if I couldn't get a gunboat or an injunction against bombardments or something. But I found the American consul flat on his back with fever and his native clerks only know one word of their own language and that's *mañana*. So I just thought I'd mention the matter to you, Mr. Murray."

"I sha'n't forget it, thank you. But let's hope there won't be any bombardment.

"I don't much care if there is," growled Bogardus. "It'd make the company build me a decent pier and give the old smoothbores something new to talk about."

* * *

"DON ZEBULON! Don Zebulon!"

Zeb Tyler found it hard work to open his eyes that morning, for he had gone to bed only two hours before, after fighting the Civil War all over again with Ezra Holcomb and a demijohn of prime old Bourbon. Rubbing his lids apart, he found standing beside his bed and shaking him by the shoulder a plump little Latin-American in a parrot-green uniform that was two-thirds tarnished gold lace.

"Good mohnin', colonel," said Captain Tyler with an accustomed courtesy that took no notice of such trifles as an aching head and parching throat. "Am I to have the honuh of yo' company at breakfast suh?"

But Colonel Pablo Paredes, the *comandante* of Puerto Velasco, was for once too deeply agitated to think of eating.

"Don Zebulon, I have come to crave your assistance as a *torpedero* of so great skill and fame. Our beautiful city is menaced with destruction by those vile pirates of Floristas. A monitor is approaching——"

Zeb Tyler waited to hear no more. Tearing away the mosquito-bar, he leaped out of bed and ran out on the veranda—or as he insisted on calling it, the gallery—for a look to seaward. His keen gray eyes, undimmed by age, picked out a tiny, familiar-looking craft slowly creeping across the sunlit blue water outside toward the two crumbling fortresses that a long-dead Spanish viceroy had built to defend the narrow entrance to Velasco harbor.

The sight of her raft-like hull and single turret was more than enough for the old Confederate.

"By gad, suh!" he growled. "It's that blank Yank monitor the *Oswego*—the *Patria*, as they call her nowadays. She's headin' fo' the po't suah enough, and she'll be within range of yo' fo'ts inside of an houah, suh."

"Within range of her guns but not of ours, Don Zebulon," replied Paredes sadly. "She could batter down our walls from afar, or steam past us into the harbor, with the balls from our ancient ordnance rebounding from her armor. Therefore I have galloped here as soon as the pirate was sighted from the ramparts, to ask your assistance and advice."

"And I shall be most happy to suhve you, suh," declared Tyler. He had a genuine liking for the chubby little *comandante*, who was a stout soldier in every sense of the word. "My advice, colonel, is to ask Mistuh Murray and the othuh consuls to go out in a launch and warn those scalawags against bringing down fo' or five navies on their heads by shootin' up fo'eign propuhty, suh."

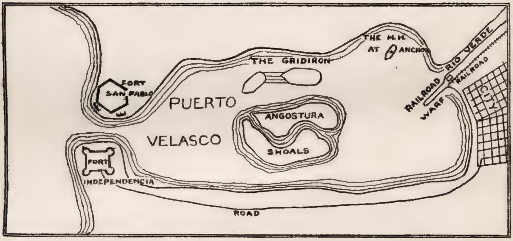
"The consuls are about to do that very thing, Don Zebulon. But in the absence of all foreign warships I fear that the Floristas will take no heed. We have neither money to pay a ranson nor force to keep them out. What then can save our city?"

"This, suh!" cried Zeb Tyler in ringing tones as, stepping back into his bedroom, he picked up and brandished the almost empty demijohn.

"That, Don Zebulon?" gasped the astounded Paredes.

Draining the last of the Bourbon into two tall glasses, Zeb Tyler courteously offered one to his guest and poured the neat contents of the other down his own throat like so much spring-water. Before the *comandante* could swallow his own portion Tyler had tucked the tails of his nightgown into a pair of duck trousers, thrust his feet into elastic-sided boots, clapped on his palm-leaf hat and was loping along the water-front, shaking one bony fist at the approaching monitor and with the other clutching the now empty demijohn.

GRIMSHAW, patrolling the otherwise deserted railroad wharf with a pick-handle in his fist and a small mountain of high explosives and other tempting loot piled up all around him, humorously compared himself to the boy who stood on the burning deck whence all but him had fled. The native stevedores had struck and departed inland at top speed on the first report of the sighting of the Florista ironclad. The freight train that was to have carried this shipment up to the mines was just now passing the city limits with refugees clinging to it like swarming bees.



Thousands of other refugees were thronging and clamoring about the stations and yards, where Bogardus was profanely making up and dispatching trains as fast as he could drive his fever- and panic-stricken staff. Out of the frightened crowd and down to the wharf came striding the tall, self-possessed figure of Captain Zeb Tyler.

"Mistuh Grimshaw," he said, lifting his hat with a stately, old-time flourish, "I wish to apologize fo' my fo'getfulness of my duties as a host last night, when I fo'ced you and the othuh young men to run fo' yo' lives to escape being bo'ed to death, suh."

"Not at all, Captain Tyler," protested the embarrassed Grimshaw, who was trying to keep his eyes off the demijohn and wondering whether the Confederate Consul was about to produce two tumblers and pour out a peace offering.

"The trouble with us of the olduh genuhration, suh, is that we live too much in the past," continued the veteran smoothly. "We sometimes fail to appreciate the wonduhs of the present, such as this, suh."

From a shattered box which the stevedores had light-heartedly smashed in throwing it up from the lighter to the pier, Zeb Tyler picked up a long yellow stick of dynamite.

"Would yo' company be willing to sell me a few qua'ts of this most efficacious explosive, Mistuh Grimshaw?"

"Quarts?"

"Or howevuh you measure it, suh," said Tyler, thrusting the stick of sixty per cent. into the mouth of the demijohn and half a dozen more after it, as tranquilly as a shopkeeper filling a jar with peppermint candy. He took out his jack-knife, split the end of the last stick and inserted a detonator, wired it, dropped it in on top of the rest, cut a groove for the wires in the side of the cork and hammered it in tight.

"Hold on there," remonstrated Grimshaw.

"Calm yo'self, Mistuh Grimshaw, calm yo'self," purred Tyler.

He closed the jack-knife, put it back in his pocket and produced a large red stick of sealing-wax and a three-inch square of thin pine, whose serrated and pink-tipped edge he rubbed sharply across the nearest dynamite box. There was a fizz, a splutter and the peculiar sulfurous stench of old-fashioned New England card-matches.

"Don' agitate yo'self, suh, don' agitate yo'self," he continued as he held the sealing-wax against the reeking blue flame.

Already softened by the tropic heat, it readily melted and was deftly smeared over the cork and neck of the demijohn.

"I found this on Mistuh Boga'dus' desk in the station," explained the garrulous old-timer, bending over his work. "I took the libuhty of borrowing it without distu'bing his exho'tations to the multitude. Mistuh Boga'dus has a magnificent flow of language, suh. I have nevuh heard nobluh rhetoric since the day I met the Yankee captain of that blink-blanked monitor, the *Oswego*. Did I evuh tell you about that, Mistuh Grimshaw?"

There was no reply because Grimshaw was no longer on the wharf; the match-striking had been too much for him. From a discreet distance he watched old Zeb Tyler ignite and burn up card after card of matches—also taken from "Mistuh Boga'dus' desk"—while the Confederate Consul waxed and talked contentedly on:

"It was in the late Spring of 1864 that I was squattin' like this in an obsohvation-pit on the no'th bank of the Jeems Rivuh, with my weathuh eye on the spot befoh me where I had anchored a jimmyjohn the ve'y spit and image of this one, suh, and cha'ged with as much black powduh as it could hold and still float. In my hands I held the ends of the wiahs I had commandeered from the nearest railroad station, togethuh with the necessary electric batteries, such as I but now intended to obtain from Mistuh Boga'dus, till I thought of a bettuh way, suh.

"Aftuh a while, suh, I brought the two wiahs togethuh and a Yankee double-enduh gunboat went fohty or fifty feet straight up into the air, settin' on top of an imposin' column of watuh. I was so much engrossed in this gratifyin' spectacle that I failed to obsuhve a landin'-party from the next Yankee vessel around the bend downstream until they began jumpin' down into the pit on top of me, Mistuh Grimshaw.

"They prodded me back ahead of 'em with the points of their cutlasses to their ship, the *Oswego*. Their captain was a naval officuh of the old school, suh, and powerful prejudiced against to'pedoes. He declared his intentions, Mistuh Grimshaw, of hanging me at his yard-arm, and was only dissuaded by the sca'city of such-like contrivances on a monitor. Next he meditated rammin' me into one of his fifteen-inch Rodman smooth-bo'es and seein' how fah I'd travel when he shot it off, suh.

"Then he thought of a still mo' dastahdly scheme.

" 'Take this ding-donged, bing-banged reb into the bows,' he commanded with horrible ferocity, suh. 'Lash him ovah the stem—make a cut-watah out of him! Let him smell out his own dash-dotted to'pedoes!'

"And fo' the rest of that day, suh, I acted as the *Oswego's* cut-watah while she was a-steamin' right amongst ouah ancho'ed to'pedoes, or mines as you call them nowadays, Mistuh Grimshaw. I reckon I'll paddle out and anchor one of them right now where it will do the most good, suh."

With a miner's pick from another burst packing-case Zeb Tyler swiftly burglarized a couple of hitherto intact boxes and looted them of much insulated wire and an electric battery and firing-device. These things and the loaded demijohn he stowed in one of the *cayucas* or native dugouts moored to the wharf, and lashed the cable of the heavy anchor-stone to the demijohn's handle.

Just as he had completed this job to his satisfaction the boom of a heavy gun drew his attention to seaward. He saw the consular launch coming back into the harbor and the monitor following menacingly astern. Diplomacy had failed; the bombardment was about to begin.

Zeb Tyler dropped into the *cayuca*, cast off the painter and paddled out into the harbor toward La Angostura—the narrowest and crookedest part of the ship-channel that zigzagged in and out through the shoals and reefs of Puerto Velasco.

CAPTAIN EZRA HOLCOMB, stumping restlessly from side to side of the *Hattie Holcomb's* bridge, saw Zeb put off in the dugout and remarked—

"What in Sam Hill do you s'pose that durned old secesh is doing out there at this time of day, Mr. Jewell?"

"Guess he's going fishing," hazarded the first officer. "Leastways he's got a jug with him."

"Crazy old coot," growled the Yankee skipper. "First thing he knows he'll find himself right in the line of fire."

"Mebbe he ain't so crazy as he looks," drawled the mate. "Guess he's figured out that that's the safest place to be, from the way both sides are shootin' just now."

The battle between the monitor and the forts was raging with great sound and fury. Each of the castles and its numerous redoubts and water-batteries had a splendid collection of rare old bronze and iron culverins, demi-cannon, cannon-royal, coehoorns, carronades and other relics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and all of them were blazing away together. Steadily through the din rolled the deep thunder of the *Patria's* fifteen-inch muzzle-loading smooth bores.

They kept it up for thirty minutes, filling the air with smoke and cannon-balls and keeping the echoes busy, but doing remarkably little damage to either the ship or the forts. Then the monitor simply steamed straight in through the narrow entrance-channel between the two highly indignant fortresses, with occasional solid shot bouncing off her ten-inch laminated armor. Up the long bay she angled from the buoy till her captain judged that the time had come to give Puerto Velasco a strong hint to pay up or take the consequences.

So he ordered a sell to fibehred into the heart of the city, now within easy range. Round spun the turret, but the spindle was worn and faulty and it turned too far. The gunners inside, shut up in a perfectly circular box, had long since lost all sense of direction. Therefore the shell missed the city by about three-quarters of a mile and flew straight across to the secluded corner of the harbor where the *Hattie Holcomb* lay at anchor, bows on, and with five large American flags prominently displayed.

"Gol durn it, you were right, Abner!" shouted Captain Holcomb as his war-trained eye observed the big black sphere with a trail of smoke from its sputtering fuse curving down on them like a comet.

"Jump for your life! She's heading straight for the bridge."

Skipper and mate hit the deck together, just as the shell smashed its way below and aft through the chart-room, fidley and engine-room into the after-hold, where it exploded. Luckily all hands who were not ashore were forward watching the bombardment, and no one was killed or even injured by the flying fragments of planking and deck-fittings that were blown up aft. When the smoke cleared they saw that the *Hattie Holcomb* was minus most of her stern and sinking rapidly.

They had just time to get the boats overside and pull clear before she went down.

"That wipes me out," said Ezra Holcomb, late skipper and owner, ruefully. "Total loss and no insurance."

"No insurance?" echoed the sympathetic but puzzled Mr. Jewell from the stern-sheets of his boat, which he had brought alongside the captain's while they checked up the count of heads. "Thought you had her well covered, sir."

" 'Except by act of war or piracy,' " quoted Captain Holcomb from the well-remembered text of the policy. "It's either one or the other, Mr. Jewel, and clear sailing for the marine insurance people. They'll never pay up in a thousand years."

"It's war, by thunder," declared the mate with approving growls from the crew, which contained an unusually high percentage of Americans. "They've fired on our flag, and Washington ought to send a warship down here to make 'em pay damages."

"And what good'd that do, 'cept to kill a lot of good boys with yellow fever, like when they sent the *Portsmouth* to Panama?" demanded the captain scornfully. "Nobody's ever squeezed a cent of damages out of these slippery yellow-bellies. The Equatan Government will just blame it on the Floristas, same as Peru did on the *Huascar's* crew."

"Then it's piracy; and what's a navy for——"

Mr. Jewell's question broke off short and remained unanswered as he and the others saw the monitor suddenly heel far over to port, right herself, push blindly past the buoy that marked the next turn of the channel and go down in a cloud of steam and a shower of spray.

"Give way!" cried Captain Holcomb. "Lay 'em aboard!"

The *Patria* had sunk in shoal water; most of her funnel and the railed top of her turret were still above the surface. Many of her crew had time to scramble out through hatches and gun-ports. Wading breast-deep along the deck, they assembled on the turret roof, around the little conning-tower that surmounted it.

"Sheer off," shrieked the *Patria's* captain, shaking his sword menacingly at the unarmed boats bearing down upon him. "Sheer off or we fire. I will only surrender to proper authority."

"I'll render you proper, you black-and-tan pirate!" answered Ezra Holcomb, "Board! Board!"

Unchecked by a rattling fire of ill-aimed pistol-shots, the *Hattie Holcomb's* men pulled right across the monitor's sunken deck and drew up alongside the island-like turret-top. Over and under the rail they scrambled, using boat-stretchers and knives, Holcomb and his bucko mates leading and clearing the way with smashing blows of their iron fists.

Peeping over the curved rim of the unroofed conning-tower, which was shaped rather like an oversized loving-cup without any handles, the *Patria's* captain shrilly exhorted his brave bluejackets to stand fast and repulse the foe. Unfortunately for himself, he was unable to look in all directions at once, though the fight seemed to be going equally badly in every quarter. Leaning over to starboard in a well-meant effort to reach the back of Mr. Jewell's neck with the point of his sword, the Florista officer failed to notice Captain Holcomb scaling the port side of the loving-cup, until he heard some one drop heavily down behind him.

Two mighty hands picked him up like a toy, lifted him high in the air, turned him about and shifted their grip till they held him dangling head-downward by the ankles. Around and around they swung him as a hammer-thrower swings his hammer and then let go.

"That," panted Ezra Holcomb. "That'll teach him to play pirate."

Terrified by their captain's fate, the battered survivors of the *Patria's* crew threw down their weapons and surrendered.

"Leave 'em be," ordered Holcomb. "Reckon I can find use for 'em. This job's done, but we've got another one to do right now."

A piercing rebel yell drew his attention to an approaching dugout, the first of many craft now putting out from shore.

"What's yo' poo' old no-account monitor good fo' now, Cap'n Holcomb?" asked the exultant Zeb Tyler. "All I had to do was to set in a splint-bottomed rocking-chair on my gallery and twiddle my fingers to bust her wide open with a jimmyjohn to'pedo, suh."

"You did, heh?" said the New Englander, whose feelings toward the *Patria* had undergone a swift and complete revulsion.

His wrath was still hot against the Florista fleet, but for the captured monitor herself he felt only the sympathy due an old comrade who had fallen on evil days.

"I'll raise her," he added, "and show you what she's good for, by thunder!"

Zeb Tyler gave a derisive snort.

"You couldn't histe her up nohow, suh. She'll stay thar and rust till Jedgment Day."

"She'll be afloat again and fitten to fight in less'n a week," proclaimed Ezra Holcomb. "It's the simplest kind of a job, as anybody 'cept a shiftless Johnny Reb could see in a minute.

"The *Patria's* lying here on hard, clean sand, in shoal water, with six inches of her turret sticking out now, at high flood. At low ebb she'll be pretty near high and dry. Most of the water inside her will run out through the hole you knocked in her bottom, and the rest can be siphoned out. Then we'll bolt a timber patch over the hole.

"Mr. Jewell, you'd better go ashore and dicker with Jim Bogardus for one of the railroad tugs and six of those big flat-bottomed lighters. Pick up a couple of hundred fathom of wire cable. We'll try and sweep lines under the monitor's keel and lash the lighters alongside, three to port and three to starboard, like pontoons to help keep her afloat.

"Mebbe we can get her own pumps to working; by the way the steam went up when she sank I calculate somebody must have opened her valves in time to save her b'ilers from busting. Magazine's flooded, of course, but this class carry their powder in water-tight copper tanks, a hundred-pound charge to a tank, so that'll be all right. Anyhow we can use the tug's pumps to take care of what leaks in around the patch after tonight's tide lifts her up and we're towing her over to the Gridiron."

The Gridiron was a famous feature of Puerto Velasco. It was built between two of the islands in the harbor and was big enough to boil a sperm whale on. As most of the water ran out of the port at low tide, a vessel could be stranded on the Gridiron and have her barnacled and weed-furred plates scraped and painted as handily as in any dry-dock.

"Why don't you float and fix up yo' own ship thataway, Cap'n Holcomb?" asked Zeb Tyler. "Never thought I'd be so sorrowful to see any Yankee craft go down as I was when those scalawags sank her, suh."

"The *Hattie Holcomb* 'll never float again," said her skipper sadly. "That shell just blew her stern off, and she's lying in deep water and on soft mud that'll swallow her up fast. 'Bout all we can do is to salvage her deck-fittings and junk her topsides at low tide. I calculate to get my money back out of salvaging the *Patria*."

"What do you aim to do with her, once you get her fixed?"

"I'll offer to take command of her and teach these Florista rebs a lesson or two in naval gunnery. Guess the Government crowd will be willing to give me a commission and hire me on 'most any terms. And in the meanwhile, Cap'n Tyler, you'd better make medicine with Colonel Paredes and start fixing up some more of your immoral whisky-jug and beer-keg torpedoes and plant 'em out there in the offing where they'll sort of discourage the rest of the Florista navy from coming in here before we're ready for 'em.

"When Admiral Don Pasquale Juan Batista Flores hears about today's doings, I guess he'll be the maddest little man afloat."

TERRIBLE indeed was the wrath of Admiral Flores when the news of the torpedoing of the *Patria* reached him at Rio Verde. Vowing a fearful vengeance, he worked for a week to put his ships into something like sea-going shape and to commandeer enough coal to take them up the coast to Puerto Velasco.

The first sight of the approaching armada was the signal for every foreign vessel in port to make sail or raise steam and scurry out to sea. Neutrals were taking no more chances with the Florista brand of marksmanship.

Piloted through the new-laid mine-fields filed the procession—a stately Royal Mail packet, a dingy Spanish liner, two British tramps and a Swedish bark. Then came a miracle. Puffing placidly along at her usual seven knots, newly painted and apparently well laden, steamed the good ship *Hattie Holcomb*.

Her appearance caused great astonishment but even greater relief to the insurgent admiral and his staff on the bridge of the flag-ship—the great German-built ironclad *Conquistador*.

"Obviously she was not sunk at all," declared Flores. "Doubtless she was not even fired on. It was all a lie—a vile trick of our enemies to discredit us with the Americans of the North."

His staff nodded in entire agreement. It was exactly the sort of story to expect in the atmosphere of wild rumors and reckless propaganda that many Latin Americans breathe from birth.

"Nevertheless, we must not take too much for granted," continued the admiral. "Signal the *Vaquero* to overhaul that steamer and make sure that she is indeed the *Hattie Holcomb*. But let it be done with all courtesy and with no display of force."

Away sped the *Vaquero*, a neat little specimen of the new class of torpedo-gunboats, at a seventeen-knot clip in the wake of the neutral shipping, which was unanimously heading up the coast to get out of range first and set a course afterward. As the diminutive warship came foaming up astern, she was greeted by a tremendously loud hail—

"Sheer off there—don't you come a-scratchin' of any of my new paint with that clockwork toy!"

There was no mistaking the voice and figure of Ezra Holcomb, known to every child up and down the Equatan coast, or the tall, thin, blue funnel, the ornate and much admired gingerbread-work on her wheel-house, and the other familiar features of the *Hattie Holcomb*.

"We were informed that you had been sunk—we rejoice that it is not so," replied the *Vaquero's* best linguist, as the gunboat drew up abeam.

There was almost no wind and less sea, so conversation was safe and easy.

"Rejoicings are mutual," answered Holcomb affably. "It wasn't this ship that was sunk; it was the other one, and she's there yet, at the bottom of Puerto Velasco harbor."

"Then she has not been raised and repaired, as we were told?" asked the Florista, thinking of the *Patria* and delighted to hear such important and welcome news.

"Take a look from your masthead and see for yourself."

"Have any more mines been planted in the channels?"

"Thick as currants in Aunt Jane's fruitcake," warned Holcomb. "You can see 'em setting out more right now in the fairway, where we came out."

"Many thanks, *señor capitán*, and good-by."

"*Hasta la vista*," bellowed Holcomb, as the *Vaquero* swung round and departed to make her report to the admiral.

The Florista fleet steamed impressively in toward the harbor mouth, where Zeb Tyler's mine-planting flotilla of dug-outs and launches were busily blocking the last open strip of channel. They scattered like water-bugs when a stone is dropped into a pond as a twelve-inch gun spoke from the *Conquistador's* forward barbette.

But their work was done; and until it was undone and the channel cleared again, it would be suicide for any ship to try to force her way into the harbor. Bringing the *Conquistador* in as closely as he deemed safe, Admiral Flores squeezed his bulk up the steep spiral stairs inside the towering military mast and studied the situation from the forward fighting-top.

He could see the unmistakable funnel and conning-tower of the sunken *Patria* still sticking out of the water on Angostura Shoal. Beyond lay the city, at the head of its long harbor but already within reach of the *Conquistador's* twelve-inch Krupps. However, there was neither plunder nor prestige to be won by bombarding Puerto Velasco at long range. Instead, Flores decided to batter down the two old fortresses and then send in his mine-sweepers to clear the channel.

Accordingly his four ironclads—the *Conquistador*, *Robusto*, *Esperanza* and *Primero de Abril*—steamed in and opened fire on the forts at four thousand yards—far outside the range of the ancient ordnance ashore. The gunners afloat had a glorious time smashing up the two most picturesque and imposing ruins in their native land.

SLIPPING into a convenient little lagoon, just around the curve of the coast-line from Puerto Velasco and very popular with the smugglers and gun-runners, the ghost of the *Hattie Holcomb* let go her anchor and lay there at peace with the world, while her skipper and crew listened to the rumbling of the distant bombardment. If any one had asked what they were doing there, he would have learned there was a breakdown in the engine-room.

But no one appeared until about five in the afternoon, when two horsemen rode down the trail from Puerto Velasco. One was a native cavalryman, who held both horses while the other man dismounted and walked to the water's edge, where he waved his hat at the steamer.

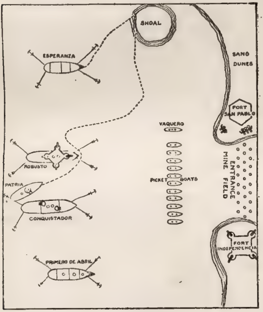
"It's the Grimshaw boy," said Captain Holcomb. "Fetch him aboard, Mr. Jewell."

The young mining engineer, who was supposed to be checking up the commandeered dynamite rather than doing volunteer staff work, was full of the excitement of his first fight.

"They kept pounding away all morning till they had hammered both forts out flat. Right after lunch Flores sent in all his steam-launches and other small fry to sweep up the mines and a couple of landing-parties to occupy the ruins. Guess he thought both garrisons must have been dead and buried by that time.

"Instead of which the *soldados* were

strung out along the sand-dunes back of the beach, where they'd been hiding all the time. Colonel Paredes may be fat, but he's no fool. He let 'em come close in and then cut loose with his Gatlings and Remingtons.



"His fire-control was pretty good, and even Equatan soldiers couldn't miss with bullet-splashes to give the range. Only one boat-load of Floristas got as far as the beach, and they had the bad luck to pick one of the likely places where old Zeb Tyler had salted down some more of our dynamite.

"After that, the rest of the flotilla sort of hung off and blazed away at eight hundred. They kept signaling for their big guns to open up again and cover the landing. They opened up all right, but they scared their own side worse than they did us. I'll bet those battleships hit everything this side of the Cordilleras.

"Something or other struck the *Llanero*, one of the two Florista torpedo-gunboats, and blew her into nine hundred little pieces. I thought it was a ten-inch Canet shell from the *Robusto*, falling short, but Zeb Tyler said it was one of the floating mines he turned loose when the ebb began to run. After what I've seen of Captain Tyler in action, I'm disinclined to argue with him. He's convinced me that the *Merrimac* whipped the *Monitor*."

"He has, has he?" rumbled Ezra Holcomb. "Young man, you'd better keep that sort of nonsense to yourself while you're on my ship, let me tell you. So you beat off the landing-party and the mine-sweepers, eh? What did Flores do after that?"

"Sent in a flag-of-truce boat to notify us that unless we surrender and let him in by dawn tomorrow he'll open fire on the city at long range. He's moved the *Conquistador* and the *Robusto* in as close as he dares and anchored them side by side in the fairway, with their big guns tilted 'way up and torpedo-nets out. The two cruisers are on either side of them, and the *Vaquero* and a lot of picket-boats keeping watch to shoreward."

"Anything of the kind to seaward?"

"Not that I could see, captain."

"Well, you trot along back and tell Colonel Paredes to expect us somewhere about midnight in his guarded tent," said Ezra Holcomb.

Picking up his speaking-trumpet, he shouted the most amazing order ever given on shipboard—

"All hands turn to and throw the ship overboard!"

Masts, funnel, dummy boats, ventilators, deckhouses, and canvas-and-batten topsides came down and splashed into the lagoon, revealing the flush deck and squat turret of the monitor *Patria.*

"Dum fools never noticed we'd grown nine foot shorter and two foot broader in the beam," chuckled Abner Jewell to Grimshaw, as he set the messenger ashore.

"What would you have done if that gunboat had sent an officer aboard?" asked Grimshaw.

"Blown her out o' water. We had both turret guns trained right on her, inside our canvas topsides. Then we'd ha' headed inshore for the shoals where the big ships dassen't follow and trusted to the good Lord and bad gunnery. How's that scarecrow we rigged up on Angostura Shoal?"

"Still in place and looks from the forts just like a half-sunken turret and funnel. It's dollars to doughnuts the Floristas think the *Patria* is still there."

"They'll l'arn different betwixt now and daylight," said Mr. Jewell. "Shove off, boys."

"Say, are you going to tackle two battleships, a couple of cruisers and a torpedo-gunboat with that little old frying-pan?" demanded Grimshaw, now standing on the beach.

"You'd better ask Cap'n Holcomb, bub," said the mate. "Most of us fit with him in the big war and l'arned to trust his jedgment. Give way, all."

The younger generation looked at the monitor, thought of the big modern Krupps and muttered sorrowfully—

"X will mark the spot."

"PRETTY lot o' blockaders," snorted Ezra Holcomb later that night. "Lights a-blazing, all hands jabbering away like a treeful o' parrakeets and somebody tinklin' a guitar. Guess they didn't learn their trade off Charleston."

With her engines turning over just enough to give her steerageway, the *Patria* crept in on the strong flood tide that was rippling past the cables of the two big ironclads lying abeam of each other on either side of the channel, outside the mine-field, with anchors out fore and aft to keep them bows-on to the shore.

Both the *Conquistador* and the *Robusto* were "citadel-type" battleships, with their engines and main batteries inside a stout iron fortress amidships. The former carried her four twelve-inch Krupps in two barbettes, placed in diagonally opposite corners of the central citadel, so that all four could be fired dead ahead or astern or right abeam. The French-built *Robusto* had a battery-plan that looked like the ace of diamonds, with a big gun at each angle, whereby she could train any three of them on the same target.

Both ships were so long and drew so much water that they could not lie athwart the channel without either grounding or masking each other's fire. As they were, with their torpedo-nets out to ward off drifting mines and all hostile guns supposedly sunk or smashed, their admiral wasted no worries on possible attacks.

He was having trouble enough with his own captains, to judge from the acrimonious language that came floating out of the brightly lighted cabin where they were holding a council of war that sounded as if it were about to break up into a mutiny within a mutiny. Everybody aft was too much interested in trying to catch the drift of the argument to notice the monitor drifting silently up on their port quarter.

"Fire!" barked Ezra Holcomb into the voice-tube leading from the conning-tower down into the turret.

A four-hundred-and-fifty-pound solid shot punched through the battleship's thin steel skin well abaft the central armor-belt to port and a little above the water-line, passed through a few bulkheads and came out to starboard, a trifle below the water-line. A three-hundred-and-fifty-pound shell, having less penetrative power, went only as far as the angle between an empty coal-bunker and the far side of the ship and stayed there for three and a half seconds, when the time-limit on the fuse expired. Several square yards of the *Conquistador's* starboard side opened up like a barn door, flooding both compartments.

Theoretically both her "soft ends" could have been shot full of holes without sinking her or impairing her fighting value. But to cool her stifling 'tween-decks every water-tight door had been left open so long that most of them had rusted tight in the guides. Before the excited greenhorn crew could even try to close them, solid water was pouring across their thresholds and in through the new shot-holes that were being made every other minute, as the *Patria* closed in and pounded grimly away.

"*Traidor!*" screamed Admiral Flores at the astounded commander of the *Robusto*. "Your ship is firing on mine!"

"Would I then be here?" countered the indignant and logical captain.

But the admiral was too excited to listen. Besides, where else could the shots possibly come from? Search-lights were not yet invented, and Equatan nights are dark.

Buttons were pressed, orders bawled, whistles blew, bells clanged, bugles sounded, the bosun piped, signals flashed, and all hands asked questions and volunteered advice while they scampered hither and yon, till they were more or less at battle stations.

Round swung the long barrels of the two twelve-inchers in the *Conquistador's* after-barbette. Depressed as far as possible, they were fired at the flash of the hostile guns. But the mark was too close and low. Crackling through the air above the *Patria's* turret, both big shells hit and tore through the astounded and righteously indignant *Robusto*. That ship promptly responded with everything she had.

Down the narrow lane of water between the two blazing, thundering leviathans floated the little monitor, now tactfully silent. Some of the saner Florista officers caught the loom of her turret and funnel against the gun-flashes across the way, and presently succeeded in stopping the panic-firing. But by that time the *Patria* had passed, the *Robusto* was listing to starboard, and the *Conquistador* was sinking stern foremost.

They were breaking out the *Robusto's* ground-tackle and had just elaborately fouled the starboard bower-anchor in the forgotten torpedo-net when the monitor edged up close under her bows and planted one shell in the chain-locker and another in the C. P. O.'s quarters. Then, rounding the battleship's ram as casually as if it had been a cape with a lighthouse on it, the *Patria* took up her station close under the *Robusto's* uptilted port bow and alternated shot and shell as fast as her stalwart gun-crews could run in, load, serve the vent, run out, train and fire. With the guns right abeam, they kept both scuttles clear for passing up ammunition and the shell-whips and travelers busy.

Machine guns, rifles and even revolvers crackled and spat unceasingly from every possible point of the *Robusto's* towering topsides. Bullets drummed on the *Patria's* iron deck like hail on a tin roof, while vicious little three-and six-pounder Hotchkiss and Nordenfelt shells hit and burst and rebounded all over the monitor's turret and conning-tower. But the battleship's big guns, that could have cracked the old cast-iron skillet wide open with one fair hit, could not be depressed far enough to hit anything so near.

Sticking tight to her hulking, helpless foe, the *Patria* kept raking the *Robusto* from stem to citadel, planting shell after bursting shell between her shattered and upheaved decks. Then, just as they unshackled the last of her cables and the battleship began to get slowly and ponderously under way, flames shot up forward and spread rapidly.

"Hit her paint-locker, I guess," thought Ezra Holcomb, sniffing the pungent smoke. "Hardwood decks, paneled passageways, and worse cluttered up than an excursion-steamer — she's nothing but an air-tight stove with the kindling all in place. Reckon I can leave her to her own devices. Time for us to be moving on."

He rang four bells, and the monitor slid away into the dark so unexpectedly that the gunners in the *Robusto's* port sponson missed the chance they had been waiting for. But by now the rest of the fleet were under way and closing in. The steam launches and cutters that had been on picket duty to shoreward came hurrying back to see what had happened and stumbled over the *Patria*.

They swarmed excitedly all about the slow-moving monitor, banging away with their Gatlings and boat-howitzers, and sending up rockets to summon the cruisers. Emboldened by the monitor's silence—for Ezra was far too thrifty to waste bullets on hornets—they ceased firing and dashed alongside.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" shouted Ezra down the voice-tube as a couple of hundred excited little Equatan officers and seamen tumbled aboard and charged across the monitor's deck, where some of them tripped over certain small round objects that did not roll but seemed to be screwed fast.

"Fire deck-clearers!" commanded Holcomb above the boarders' triumphant yells and the clangor of gun-butts and hand-spikes on the closed hatch-covers and port-shutters. Already the Floristas were scaling the turret to drag him and his quartermaster out of the conning-tower, where the two Americans stood at bay with their revolvers ready.

Sighting through the peep-hole before him, Holcomb pulled trigger and saw the swarthy face of the man he shot lighted by the flash of the Colt. But the sound of the pistol-shot was swallowed up in the crashing roar of the "deck-clearers"—an obscure Civil War invention long since forgotten by most people but not by Ezra Holcomb, who had found these specimens in the *Patria's* shell-room and screwed them into their sockets on deck, with the fuses hanging down below, to be lighted when needed.

While still crouching down inside the "loving-cup" to escape the pieces of iron and other things that were humming past and pattering down, Holcomb felt the monitor abruptly heel far over to port and heard a great wave break and rush foaming across her low flush deck and the strangling cries of those whom it swept struggling and screaming into the sea. For a moment he thought the *Patria* had struck a drifting mine. But she rolled back, righted, and steamed on just as if nothing had happened.

It was no longer dark when Ezra Holcomb stood up and looked about him. Ships and sea and shore were lighted with a ruddy glare from the burning *Robusto*, now afire from stem to stern, with flames spouting out of every port and dead-light in her upheaved port side. Beyond her, he could make out the military masts but nothing more of the *Conquistador*. A marbled, fire-lit cloud of smoke and steam hung over the spot where she had gone down.

"Sunk, by glory, and blew up her b'ilers, most likely, when she went under. That's what threw up that wave that swept our decks, I reckon," hazarded Holcomb. "Put all those poor burned and mangled ——s out of their misery quick and easy."

Dents and stains on the monitor's deck-plates and a few struggling swimmers among the overturned boats, black against the red waters astern, were all that remained of the hapless boarding-party. But fresh foes were already at hand. Bearing down on the *Patria*, no longer hidden by darkness, came the torpedo-gunboat *Vaquero* and the cruisier *Esperanza*.

"Hard-a-port!" commanded Ezra, as the swift little gunboat flashed by to starboard, her Hotchkiss guns barking spitefully.

But it was not of them he was thinking but of the white streak that was unrolling itself across the crimson water, straight for the monitor's side. The idle thought leaped to Holcomb's mind that it looked like the diagonal stripe on a Confederate battle-flag.

Round swung the *Patria's* bows in time to let the Whitehead flash harmlessly past her starboard quarter. But the change of course brought her into the *Esperanza's* line of fire. That cruiser was an old-fashioned broadside ironclad, ship-rigged and with a wicked-looking ram curving down beneath her bowsprit. She disappeared behind a cloud of her own smoke as her forward pivot and the long row of sixty-four pounders in her starboard battery spoke together.

Then out she surged, the white water creaming up about her steel-shod stem in a way that sent cold chills down the sturdy back of the quartermaster at the *Patria's* helm. For he saw that the two warships were running on converging courses and at relative speeds which in another five minutes would bring them together at exactly the right angle for the cruiser's long, sharp ram to cut through the monitor's plates like scissors through tinfoil.

"Hold her steady," grated Holcomb, as the helmsman tried to ease her off.

Knowing his skipper as he did, the quartermaster kept the *Patria* on her course, though he could not keep from stealing an occasional glance to port. Every time he looked, the cruiser was nearer and bigger, till she seemed right on top of them.

Then she slowed and shivered to a stop, with the mud boiling up beneath her forefoot, her fore-topmast crashing down, and all Bedlam breaking loose on her deck. The *Patria* slid safely by, leaving the *Esperanza* stuck hard and fast on an uncharted and unsuspected sand-bar.

"I'll tend to you later, you café-navigators," promised Ezra Holcomb as he plodded out to seaward. "But just now I'm busy. Here comes that dratted little spit-fire again."

The torpedo-gunboat was hurrying back for another try. Deceived by the monitor's silence, the *Vaquero's* captain decided that her turret must be jammed. Knowing the quaint and picturesque habits of his own primitive Whiteheads, he ran in and fired both tubes at close range.

Straight and true sped the first torpedo to within fifty yards of the target, when it dipped and dived deep under her keel. The other maintained a proper depth but jammed its rudder so that it swung round the *Patria's* stern and kept on swinging in a circle.

"Holy Halibut!" swore Ezra Holcomb, following its course with fascinated eyes as the turret trundled round beneath him. "It's coming around to blow up its owners."

Past the *Patria's* bows circled the white streak and curved right into the *Vaquero's* course. Just as they seemed at the point of contact, the monitor's guns thundered and hid everything with smoke. Through the smoke-cloud Ezra Holcomb saw a great leaping flash of flame, and felt his cap blown off by the wind of a fearful explosion that dazed and deafened him with its stupendous roar. When the smoke cleared, the *Vaquero* had vanished; blown into nothingness by each and every Whitehead aboard.

"Was it one of our shells or her own torpedo, I wonder?" mused Ezra. "Reckon we'll never know. Anyhow I guess that was the last of the Floristas. No, by thunder, there's still the old *Primero de Abril*. Well, we ought to be able to take her on single-handed."

The one blockader left had been busy up to now rescuing survivors from the *Robusto* and the *Conquistador*. She was of the same type as the stranded *Esperanza*, but there was one notable difference. Somebody aboard her knew how to shoot.

The very first shell from her Armstrong pivot-gun burst squarely over the *Patria's* after-deck.

"That's more like it," said Holcomb appreciatively. "Yankee or limey deserter, probably. Train turret to starboard," he added down the voice-tube.

"She's jammed, sir!" came the reply.

"Steer on your own hook till further orders," cried Holcomb to the quartermaster as the skipper clambered out of the "loving-cup."

Running across the turret roof, he dropped down to the deck and made an investigation. Soon he found the cause of the trouble—a great segment of shell-casing, wedged tight between the deck and the lower edge of the turret.

Ezra Holcomb stepped to the nearer sight-hole and called—

"Mr. Jewell!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Send a working-party on deck with sledges and drills. Pass the word to raise spindle to extreme elevation and stand by."

"What was *that*, sir?" asked the mate as another shell hit and carried away something else with a ringing clang.

"Most of our smoke-stack," coughed the captain. "Hurry up those engine-room hands."

Five grimy artificers bobbed up out of the after-hatch and attacked the chunk of hot iron that was keeping both guns out of action. It was a hard job, made harder by the blinding, choking soft-coal smoke blown forward from the ragged stump of the funnel.

"I'll bring her head up into the wind," thought Holcomb.

But before he could return to the conning-tower a tremendous concussion knocked him flat on deck. When he picked himself up there was no conning-tower left for him to return to. The cruiser's third shell had hit the "loving-cup" and blown it away, wheel, quartermaster and all.

"Rig preventer-tackles! Tell the chief to raise more steam and get steerageway on her."

"Chief reports all flues choked with soot when the smoke-stack went and no draft since, sir."

Unable to steam, steer or bring a gun to bear, the *Patria* lay like a log.

"All hands on deck!" shouted Ezra Holcomb. "She's going to run us down!"

Straight for the drifting monitor's starboard side came the cruiser, slowing as she approached, for only a touch of the ram would be needed. She was less than a hundred yards away when men began to shout and a Gatling sputtered excitedly from her port or shoreward side, which was in deep shadow, for the burning wreck of the *Robusto* lay to seaward.

"What are they shooting at?" wondered Holcomb.

"Torpedoed!" yelled Abner Jewell. "Torpedoed right amidships!"

A sheet of flame and a spout of water shot up alongside the *Primero de Abril*. Her masts and yards reeled drunkenly against the stars, then heeled slowly over to port as she began to fill and sink.

"*Patria* ahoy!" gasped a choking voice from the sea.

"It's that sharpshootin' deserter," said Holcomb. "Anybody who can shoot like that is worth saving."

He hove a line at the darker spot in the darkness that showed where the swimmer was struggling and felt him catch and hang on. They drew in a man who was gripping the line with one hand and with the other supporting a senseless comrade.

"Grimshaw!" cried Holcomb. "What are you doing out here, son?"

"Running naphtha launch," explained the exhausted young engineer. "Spar-torpedo—too big a charge—threw up wave that swamped us before we could back away — warned him it would, but he wouldn't listen—poor old Zeb."

As if roused by the sound of his name, Zeb Tyler opened his eyes.

"Evening, gentlemen," he murmured confusedly, his mind still back in the sixties. "Did I sink that blank Yank?"

"Where in thunder do you think you are, you durned old secesh?" growled Ezra Holcomb happily. "Don't you know the war's over?"

"Of co'se it is," said Zeb Tyler, fully grasping the situation. "If they wanted their war to last, they ought to have kept us out of it, suh."

A TETON FABLE

by Frank H. Huston

JOHNNY WHOA HAW, mule-skinner, as his name implies, sat in the tepi of Ta Sunka Nanji, The Standing Horse, tenderly nursing with gingerly finger-tips his bruised and battered features, venomously hissing through swollen lips anathemas upon all the world and the "blue-bellies" who had a few evenings previously thwarted his to him laudable endeavor to "lift" a certain desirable half-bred horse that was herded with the animals belonging to the troops of the post not far away.

Johnny had slipped out of the Cheyenne-Arapaho camp on the Lodge Pole Creek, sneaked into the herd and worked the animal of his choice to the edge of the grazing bunch under cover of darkness, when one of the guards, sensing something wrong in the movements of the animal, had with commendable promptitude thrown a leaden interrogation and later verbal challenge in that direction, the heavy .45 slug passing directly under Johnny's nose, removing part of his hirsute adornment, and likewise his personality, from the locality with considerable speed.

Watan Gaa, The Black Coyote, through long association with Sunka, his *ba-ni*, or chum, having acquired a working knowledge of the white man's language, followed Johnny's tale with interest. As the latter paused for breath, the brave's eyes twinkled, and with a glance at Sunka, who snorted softly, murmured—

"*Hecen tuwe womanan*——"

"Thief, ——! What's that he says about a thief, Shunk? I'm no thief. What's lifting a horse now and then in this country, and from the army at that?

"It's an old proverb, Johnny, from a fable of the Sioux, right appropriate, too, in the premises. Didn't chuh never hear it? Lord, it's told in every tribe and camp from the Big Muddy to the Rockies."

"Nah. Wot's it all about?"

"Gaa'll tell you. He knows it better than I do. Spill it, *ba-ni*."

With a grave but malicious smile the Indian began imitating the tone and manner of one of the professional tribal "tellers of stories"—

"*Sunka wan*——"

"But what's it mean?" interrupted Johnny impatiently. "Tell me that first; then mebbe I'll not want to hear the story."

"Why, 'a thief who joins himself with more experienced thieves becomes more proficient and skilful in his chosen occupation'—is about as near as I can put it in English."

"Huh!" from Johnny with a painful grin at the two. "You-all want to take on another pardner?"

"*Touche*," from Sunka, while Gaa broadly guffawed.

"No, Johnny. We strive to please, but yet harder to be honest——"

"Honest!" snorted the skinner. "You-all? Ain't all Sunkas thieves?" This was a play on his host's name, for Sunka is dog, and Ta Sunka is medicine dog, or horse. "Better take me in and learn me the business," he added.

"You ain't grown up enough yet, Johnny. Mebbe we'll see bymebye, but let Gaa tell the story if you've never heard it."

Johnny subsided, grumbling, and the Indian softly resumed:

"*Sunka wan, ka wakanka wan, wakin wan tanka hnaka*——"

As the skinner stirred restlessly and seemed about to utter a protest, he switched to English:

"There was a dog once, and an old woman. This old woman had plenty *wasna*, you callum pemmican, all nice put in *parfleche* in her tepi.

"Now this dog plenty hongry; he find out this old woman got this *wasna*, and he sit near the tepi on his tail all time and howl and think how he can get this meat from the old woman.

"Old woman see dog sit there and say 'Whoosh; go way dog,' and throw stick so dog go way and think. Bumby come plenty dark and dog he crawl up under tepi edge and try steal sack of this meat. Waugh! Old woman hear this dog, she say: *Whoosh!* Watter —— you do?' And hit dog with one stick, break um head open, dog run away, holler like good one, his head so sore and he so mad because he no gettum meat.

"He lie down pooty sick, and bumby some more dog come along, see him, and askum, 'Watsamatter?' This dog he tellum all other dog all about old woman. All dog say, '*Hunhunhe.* That too bad.' And old dog he think and say, 'I know wat we do; we call council and see if we can help our brother.' So he holler loud, 'Hey, Yaksa—' that's Bite 'Em Off—'Hai, Tahu Wasaka—' him's Strong Neck—'Ho, Taisanpena—' what you say, Sharp Knife—and, 'Hey, Minne Bozan'—he's Water Mist—'you all come council and help our brother.'

"So all these dog come, and *hunka kanpi* do—they tell the story—'*Keyape,*' they say—'We fix um.'

"So bumby come plenty dark, all dog go to old woman's tepi. She asleep. *Minne bozana,* he makum come rain and putty soon all the tepi thong wet, get soft, and pegs slip out of soft ground. Tepi fall down. Yaksa, he bitum thongs, and Strong Neck, he quick ketchum all *parfleche* and run away.

"Old woman she scairt, holler, '*Lay non, wasicun, wase cha a hepe ah la*'—'The enemy come, the white men, the bad Winter snow covers me up—'

"But all this dog they run to river and sit down, and pooty soon Sharp Knife he cut um open all this *parfleche* and all this dog gotum plenty chuck, all same look like *Grow Varnt.* And this is the story the old men tell. *Hecen tuwe womanan*——"

Forty years rolled away, and Sunka sat in the tepi of Wagalexa Conka, ex-Texas Ranger, Indian agent, Bill show agent and now author and director for the movies, telling this story, as they watched the Cajuenga Hills.

"But, Sunka," asked Conka, tossing back his mop of graying hair with the characteristic motion of his, "they call it, 'The Fable of the Tetons with a Moral.' Where's the moral? I've heard the story hundreds of times but never could see the moral."

"The moral's here, Conka," the grizzled old scout grinned. "Just three months later I and Gaa sold that horse to a tenderfoot at Grand Forks in the Lakotah country."

Conka shouted and slapped his thigh.

"*Wahhhhh,* you old Piute! Say, write it up and send it to I Wodake Ape Itacan—the Talking Leaf Chief—who sits in the Medicine Tepi of *Adventure,* in the far-off country of New York; he likes just that sort of story."

"Wel-l-l, I dunno, Conka; 'twouldn't hardly do——"

"Wouldn't? Why not?"

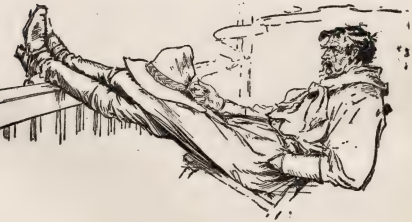
"Well, you see Conka, that horse belonged to Colonel Carrington of the 'Walk a Heaps'—and——"

"And—?"

"And Colonel Carrington was——"

"Well?"

"Was Arthur Hoffman's cousin."



A Son of Strife

A THREE-PART STORY

Part II

by

ARTHUR D HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "Fair Salvage," "The Heels of Chance," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

SIR GUI DE TABERIE of Nerak, in the marches of Outremer that formed the borderland between the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem and the Saracens of Saladin, was a man of sudden impulses and strong passions.

Deep in his love, fierce in his hate, he left a heritage to his only son, Matteo, that might have crushed the spirit of any man. It was a heritage of shame, outlawry, and the peril of an implacable vengeance.

Sir Gui had won his mate, Horazahde, from the desert, overwhelming the caravan of the Prince of Emesa, who was despatching her to the Emir El-Afdel as an unwilling bride, and carrying her off to his castle eerie.

She came to him willingly, caught in the fire of his romantic passion. But she scorned the ties of the Church with which Fray Gilberto wished them to be bound. Even when Matteo was born she still fiercely protested against the Christian rite.

"I am of the desert," she exclaimed. "And I am yours because you took me. No *hojji* nor priest could make me more your wife."

So the child grew to be a man, adored by his father's retainers, and accorded all the consideration of a young prince. He had the spirit of both the Frank and Saracen, fused in a leaping flame of courage and loyalty.

His companion and instructor was Ali Ma'akwaa, the gentle-voiced but hard-hitting captain of Turcoples. From him he learned something of the art of war; and from John the Englishman, his father's friend, he got the gentle art of jongleurie—the art of improvising ballads and setting them to stirring strains—a rare art in days of daily strife.

There came a day when the vengeful Prince of Emesa with his ally, the Emir El-Afdel, rushed out of the desert in a slashing foray upon Nerak. Through treachery the castle was taken. Flames swept the stronghold. Behind a heap of his enemies the old lion finally fell, and the fair Horazahde died with him.

Turning as he fell, the knight shouted above the uproar:

"Live, my son! Live, Matteo! For vengeance!"

Ali Ma'akwaa and the youthful Matteo, the only survivors, fled to the neighboring castle Mardan, of the Count Renier de Chappes. But this knight refused him help. Spurning him as an outcast without a name, he might have done him violence instead; but Ali and Matteo, at the points of their daggers, won free—a bleak, friendless world before them, and a tradition of hate behind.

Matteo had once aided a refugee to escape from Manasses, the son of Renier de Chappes, and this had intensified their hate. On the other hand he had gained the friendship of Brygas, Renier's ward—and a curious ring which Kafur, the grateful refugee, had hurriedly thrust upon him.

With only these memories of living friendship, Matteo and his comrade turned their horses toward the sea, determined to secure the help of John the Englishman, and Messer Gambaglio, a Genoese, of Tripoli, who had been his father's banker.

Equipped only with a gittern, upon which Matteo strummed the accompaniments of his own ballads, they came to Acre and embarked on an Italian ship for Tripoli. They were armed as men-at-arms pledged to fight for the *patrono* if pirates attacked them.

On the third day a pirate ship bore down on them grappled, and drove the defenders in a struggling mass back upon the poop. Here Matteo, caught in the arms of the pirate chief, felt that he was about to die, when the leader caught sight of his dagger-hand, and recoiled with a cry.

"Forgive me, lord," he mumbled thickly. "You should have given me the sign."

And he rapidly called off his pirates and pushed clear.

Matteo slipped Kafur's ring—the Ring of Sinan—from his finger and put it in his pouch.

"A pirate may honor it," said he; "but a Christian Templar would cut its possessor down."

At Tripoli they found the house of Gambaglio, but the banker scornfully denied them, demanding proofs of identity that Matteo did not possess.

In a murderous temper they sought out an inn. Here they imposed upon the inn-keeper, and procured a room.

A moment later the door flew open and Gambaglio entered, falling upon his knees, protesting that he had only just had word from the *patrono* of the pirate's attack.

"The sign!" exclaimed the Genoese. "Had you but told me, you could have had whatever you sought."

"Why?"

"Because you speak for the Lord of Death; and I, too, am of the circle of agents of the Old Man of the Mountain."

When the banker had gone, Matteo looked dazedly at his comrade, the Turcople.

"Ali, heard you what I heard?"

"Lord," stammered Ali, "there was talk of this and that—an old man—great treasure——"

"Aye," mused Matteo grimly, "and of vast peril!"

CHAPTER XI

HOW MATTEO SANG TO PRINCE BOHEMOND

"SO YOU are Gui's son!"

John the Englishman placed his two hands on Matteo's shoulders and squared him off so that they stood eye to eye. Matteo saw a man whose spare frame and youthful gaze gave the lie to graying hair and deep-cut wrinkles in a meditative face.

They met in a chamber of Prince Bohemond's palace, overlooking the valley of the Orontes and the wide, open spaces of Antioch set within the girdle of the gigantic walls which traversed the surrounding mountains. And for this occasion Matteo had doffed his mail, and stood clad in such richly simple garb as became a squire who presents himself at a fastidious court. The gittern the Gray Friars had given him was slung across his back from a parti-colored ribbon. Ali was below in the palace courtyard hobnobbing with the soldiers of the guard.

"Aye, you are Gui's son!" repeated John the Englishman. "I would have known you anywhere. And Gui is dead! Alas, what use is it now to say I warned him years ago that God would seek him out for what he did?"

"He bade me come to you," said Matteo, "but if——"

"Nay, nay! You misunderstand me. 'Tis no fault of yours your father did wrong, fair son. I am not held in thrall by the churchmen, and I have my own opinions on such matters. But we must look facts in the face. I like you. I will do for you what I may. But you start life with a heavy disability."

"For what men say I care little," answered Matteo haughtily. "I have my sword for those who cross me."

"Oh, aye, spoken like a warrior. But have you no ambitions?"

Matteo thought for a moment.

"Two, Messer John."

"And those?"

"I would sing songs, compose romaunts, live as you have lived. And I would wreak vengeance on my enemies."

"I see you carry a gittern. Ho, humph! But who are these enemies? The Prince of Emesa and his ally—what did you call him? El-Afdel?"

"Aye, and Renier de Chappes, who would not stir a finger to punish the murderers of my mother and who will take what is rightly mine, if the king permits."

"Of de Chappes I say naught. I never liked the man. But touching the other, Matteo, Achmet-ibn-Muros is your grandfather."

Matteo's face darkened.

"Does it matter what he is to me—save that he slew my father and my mother?"

"What a land! What a land!" murmured John the Englishman to himself.

He paced back and forth across the room.

"But in this scheme of life you have laid down there is no place for love," he pointed out, coming to a halt again before Matteo.

"What time have I for love?" responded Matteo. "Nay, Messer John, whom shall I love? I have a fortune sufficient to a career, belike, but what maid would wed with me? Nor do I think on that side of life. I shall sing songs, and hate my enemies—and perchance slay them in time."

John the Englishman shook his head.

"You have much to learn," he said briefly. "Love, Matteo, is the greatest force in the world. Love fetched me hither into Outremer out of faraway England—and now love forces me to tarry when I might otherwise be passing a comfortable old age in a safe castle on my own Welsh marches. For, know you, there are many kinds of love, of which love of women is the chief; and after that love of a land or a good cause may be reckoned next best."

He fell into a muse, and Matteo stared

at him, puzzled by this whimsical philosophy.

"But you spoke of singing songs," continued the old jongleur, arousing himself. "Do you know aught of the jongleur's craft?"

"Nay, Messer John," said Matteo, blushing," who am I that I should make pretense to art before you?"

"At least, you carry a gittern," returned John the Englishman, smiling. "Pick me a lay."

Matteo swung his instrument into place, and swept the strings with practised fingers.

"A lay of woman's love, by your leave," he said with an answering smile, "such as you were pleased to uphold against my ignorance:

"Hark to the lay of Ysabeau,
Ysabeau the fair;
She was a maid of slender form,
Sun-gold was her hair.
But never a man had seen her—
She dwelt in a castle tall—
And a giant like a cedar
Glowered across the wall.

The arras covering the doorway of the chamber was pushed aside, and a young squire with a pleasant, open face bowed to John the Englishman. The old jongleur motioned apologetically to Matteo, who thrust the gittern behind him.

"What is it, de Pugne?" he asked.

"I crave your pardon, Messer John," answered the squire, "but Prince Bohemond sends urgent summons.

A frown knitted the brow of John the Englishman.

"It is——"

He paused significantly.

"Aye, lord, he hath been seized again."

The jongleur turned to Matteo.

"Our lord, the prince, is subject to attacks of a melancholic affection," he explained. "To say sooth, Matteo, Bohemond is a sad case of wasted youth. Now he is persuaded he hath nothing to live for."

"Without you to divert him I know not what we would do, Messer John," said the young squire gratefully.

"You exaggerate, de Pugne," returned John the Englishman, laughing. "And here is a voice that makes mine sound like the clanking of rusty armor."

He clapped his hand on Matteo's shoulder.

"Aye, lad, I mean it," he went on, noting Matteo's look of startled deprecation. "If you have the gift of composition, your fortune as a jongleur is secure."

The squire stepped forward eagerly.

"A suggestion, Messer John. There is naught which entertains the prince more readily than something new. Perhaps this youth——"

"It might be," admitted John. "What say you, Matteo? Will you put your fortune to the proof? Bohemond is a savage lord, and in these tempers—— But I would not guide you. Decide for yourself."

Matteo picked up his cap from a chair.

"I will try what I may do, Messer John," he said quietly.

"Good! If you please Bohemond, your future is assured. He is generous with those he likes. Come, we will go to him. But first you must know Messer François de Pugne, one of the Prince's body squires. This is Matteo de Nerak, son of an old friend of mine, de Pugne."

"I greet you well, Messer Matteo," said the squire, and his clear, straightforward glance assured Matteo of loyal friendship.

The three walked through the long corridors of the palace into the farther wing. Tall foot-sergeants grounded partizans and stood aside to let them pass. Servants parted the thick hangings, and they entered a great chamber, walled and vaulted with stone, its open windows drawing in the breezes of the neighboring gardens. On a throne-like chair at the opposite end crouched a gaunt-featured, pallid man in early middle age, with his chin cupped in his hand and his eyes staring gloomily before him.

"Ha, John," he said in a lifeless voice, "you are come at last. I need you. What a curse of desolation is this world!"

"A curse? Nay, lord. The sickness of the mind is upon you, but we shall soon dispel it. See, I——"

The prince straightened in his chair.

"Who is with you?" he demanded with displeasure. "I asked for you, John, not for whoever chanced to be with you. Send the youth away."

"It shall be as you wish," answered John the Englishman soothingly. "But he is a jongleur of rare promise. I thought 'twould divert you, lord, to hear another voice, an echo out of the kingdom of youth which time hath wrested from me no less surely than from you."

Bohemond glared down at Matteo from the throne.

"Youth! I would give all Antioch for youth! Boy, can you make me forget my lost youth? Can you make me forget the slight the Emperor of Byzantium hath put upon me? I am not good enough to wed his daughter! I, Bohemond, Prince of Antioch! I am not good enough to mate with the spawn of the Comnenoi! Phaugh! He shall pay for it! He shall yet crawl to me.

"I had fitted out galleys for an escort for the bride. Now they shall ravage the Greek coasts.* Blood will wipe out the insult; aye, blood will wipe it out!"

The prince leaned back exhausted.

"I am in no mood to hear sickly romaunts of love, I warn you!" he croaked. "You had best try me another time."

"Nay, I will try you today, with your leave, lord," said Matteo firmly.

"If you will," returned the prince indifferently. "At the least—" a saturnine grimace twisted his face—"I shall have the opportunity of venting my spleen upon you if you annoy me. Go on, boy."

John the Englishman looked doubtfully at Matteo.

"Not the romaunt you started for me," he whispered.

Matteo only nodded. His fingers plucked from the strings of the gittern a wild tumult of melody, the roar of a conflict, war-cries, screams of the dying, the crack of breaking spears, the crash of opposing chargers, clank of weapons on armor. Bohemond's eyes brightened; he sat erect. The room became very quiet.

"Harken to me," began Matteo. "I shall recite to you the deeds of our ancestors. I shall tell you how the host of the Crosses mustered from every corner of Europe, how they traveled in storm and in sunshine across the countries of the world and burst like a flood upon the paynims. I shall tell you how they traversed the land of Asia and how they conquered Nicea, Robais, Acre and Jerusalem; but above all, how they won the great city of Antioch, which sat secure behind walls like mountains built by men upon the tops of God's mountain. I shall tell you of all the noble lords and warriors who did these deeds, of Godfrey de Bouillon and his brother, Baldwin, of Hugh the Great, of Tancred, but above all of Bohemond, the founder of a line of warriors always in the forefront of battle."

"The *Chanson d'Antioch*," muttered the squire de Pugne.

"Aye," whispered John the Englishman. "Do but watch Bohemond."

As Matteo continued into the rimed verses of the main body of the narrative, his gittern interpreting the spirit of the words as he sang or recited, the hunted look disappeared from the prince's face. His eyes gleamed at reference to the exploits of his mighty ancestor, first of the Princes of Antioch. The tenseness left him. He sat easily, interested, absorbed, his twitching hands at rest.

An hour passed, and Matteo never faltered; his voice rang true; his fingers were sure on the strings. Time dwindled into nothingness. The three who listened forgot themselves in the magic of tone and melody. Other hours flew by, and John the Englishman commenced to wonder whether Matteo could support the effort much longer. Once John was tempted to interfere, but he dreaded to break the spell which wrapped Bohemond. So the afternoon waxed toward evening, and just as the first shadows barred the room Matteo concluded the description of the siege of Antioch and the capture of the Gate of St. George by Bohemond I. and his little band of sixty men.

"An end to my tale, O prince!" he proclaimed in a voice that clanged through the high-vaultered room. "As your fathers before you live in history by the splendor of their deeds, so shall you, too, be remembered by those who come after you."

The prince drew a deep breath.

"*Pardi*, Messer Jongleur!" he cried. "Who are you that have charmed me out of myself?"

"Your servant, lord, Matteo de Nerak."

"You have pleased me, Matteo; aye, once more this night I may sit with my knights and take joy in being alive. For these past hours you won me back my youth. What may I do to reward you?"

"Grant me leave to abide at your court, prince."

"Nay, I shall not let you depart. Come hither."

Bohemond stripped from his person a heavy golden chain, and hung it about the youth's neck.

"Take this, I beg you, as earnest of the favor which shall be yours. 'Tis gold, but no more golden than your voice. Ha, by our Lady, the ring on your finger! That ring! Where got you that ring?"

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*Such an occurrence did befall about this time.

The prince started back with hands upflung, as if to defend himself against attack.

"John! De Pugne! 'Tis an Assassin!"

The two rushed forward, aghast, uncertain.

"Nay, lord, I know the youth!" protested John the Englishman. "His father was my friend. What——"

"Look at that ring!" commanded Bohemond, pointing with a shudder at Matteo's hand.

Silently Matteo held up the ancient silver circlet with its device of the triple-bladed knife.

"The ring of Sinan!" gasped John the Englishman.

His face became grim and watchful.

"Speak quickly, boy!" he said. "Are you in sooth whom you claim, or some foul——"

"I am Matteo de Nerak," answered Matteo calmly. "As for this ring, 'tis what you call it. I had it from one for whom I did a chance kindness. I had supposed it a talisman of power, but your words make me suspect it is an evil omen."

"'Tis the signet of the Old Man of the Mountain," said de Pugne.

"That I know," admitted Matteo.

"And do you not know that he is the enemy of all other princes?" demanded Bohemond.

"Now you speak of it, I do recall being told so; but I am no agent of Sinan. It helped bring me hither."

"How?" questioned the prince.

"That is a lengthy tale, lord."

Bohemond settled back in his chair with a smile of satisfaction.

"Get you about the telling of it," he said. "Nay, John, I am persuaded the youth speaks the truth. This is rare good fortune. I must have my pleasure while I can. Tell all, Messer Matteo."

So Matteo told in detail how he had encountered Kafur on the Judean hills, how he had helped the Assassin to escape, how he had journeyed to Tripoli and how a merchant there—some instinct prompted him to withold Messer Gambaglio's name—had accepted his identity after sight of the ring and rendered up to him his father's treasures.

"Name the merchant," ordered the prince sharply at this point. "Doubt not he is one through whom Sinan works to slay those whom he hath marked for death."

"But, lord, if I name him it will be known that I betrayed him, and Sinan will slay me."

Bohemond pondered this for a moment.

"True," he agreed finally. "Well, so be it. Messer Matteo, I have a fancy for you. You shall abide at Antioch, and Messer John shall teach you certain niceties of the jongleur's art which you have not yet learned. De Pugne, take heed to the needs of Messer Matteo. Lodge him with the squires of the household. John, attend me to the great hall."

CHAPTER XII

HOW MATTEO CHANGED HIS NAME

"HO, MATTEO, hast heard the news?" De Pugne dashed into the room where the jongleur was sitting, scratching toilsomely with an iron pen upon a fair sheet of the tough paper that Saracen merchant's brought from Cathay.

"Fair as the moon's pellucid rays," muttered Matteo to himself. "Rays? Rays? Ways—says—days! Aye, days it shall——"

"Certes, you are a very clerk," rapped de Pugne. "Give over your love rimes! St. Benedict, you who know naught of women, becoming a singer of love romaunts! It passeth belief."

"Fair as the moon's pellucid rays," repeated Matteo thoughtfully. "'Tis more sugary than I like, yet— What was it you said, François?"

"I said there was news."

"As what?"

"The king is here."

"The king! What king?"

Matteo rose in his astonishment.

"Ha, at last you are touched!" triumphed de Pugne. "Why, who but the King of Jerusalem?"

"Amalric! What doth he here?"

"He tarries to visit Bohemond on his return from a sojourn at the court of the Emperor of Constantinople. Even now his company are within the city. Hark, you may hear the trumpets of the prince's guard sounding in the courtyard."

As de Pugne spoke, the silvery clamor of the trumpets rang through the open windows. There was a noise of heralds' voices, deep and resonant, then a mighty cheering.

Matteo ran to the window. Up the broad street which led to the palace poured an imposing procession of knights and men-at-arms, headed by a huge man on a broad-backed war-horse, whose helm was encircled by a golden crown.

"Why, there are women's head-dresses amidst the helmets!" he cried.

"Aye, Amalric is companioned by Queen Maria and some of her ladies. But haste, Matteo! I came hither that you might miss naught. Bohemond was taken by surprize, yet he desires to make a brave showing against the king's court. Bring your gittern, and come to the Hall of Audience. Perchance you shall entertain the king and his lords."

"Perchance I shall not!" growled Matteo, nevertheless taking his instrument from the table. "I have no kind feeling for Amalric. 'Twas he sanctioned the seizure of my father's fief by that foul cur de Chappes."

"What else might the king do?" returned de Pugne reasonably, walking by Matteo's side. "Nerak is a fortess of the desert march which holds the approaches to Jericho. 'Twas in ruins, ungarrisoned. Amalric hath no money to rebuild fortresses and hire men-at-arms. He was forced to give it to the lord who was able to resume its defense."

"There were other lords than Renier de Chappes," retorted Matteo, "who sat idly by while my father and mother were slain. Nay, François, put yourself in my place."

"I would that I might," replied de Pugne promptly. "I am a squire of unknown name, who may be a knight a year hence. You are the most famous jongleur of Outremer—and all in two years' time. Why, I remember the day I burst into Messer John's chamber and first heard you singing 'The Lay of Ysabeau' and afterward you charmed Bohemond out of a black mood, as you have done many times since, God wot! But then you were a youth of less account than I, while now men come from Jerusalem and Tripoli and Cyprus and Byzantium and even Armenia to hear your romaunts——"

"Have done! Have done!" laughed Matteo, brought to good humor in spite of himself. "Some part of what you say is sooth, François, yet I would have you consider that your name, if unknown, is honorable, and mine——"

He broke off as they entered the Hall of Audience from the rear of the dais whereon three chairs were placed. Around it were ranged the lords and ladies of the court of Antioch, with a fringe of jesters, jongleurs, tumblers and squires and upper servants. Standing in front of the central of the three chairs was Prince Bohemond in a scarlet robe edged with miniver. By the great entrance doors waited the heralds and pursuivants, ready to announce the king's entrance. John the Englishman from his place near the prince hailed Matteo and de Pugne, and they edged their way toward him through the crowd.

"Right glad am I to have a word with you, dear lad," he whispered, flinging an arm around Matteo's shoulders. "You must know de Chappes is with the king. But heed my counsel, and give him no attention. Bohemond will bid you to sing and I would not have you put out by meeting the eye of your enemy."

Matteo's face flamed with color, but he made no answer. Indeed, at that moment a squire ran up to the entrance of the hall, and the heralds set trumpets to their lips and blew a fanfare.

"Ho, lord of Antioch!" cried a pursuivant who stepped forward between them. "Hither approaches the dread lord, Amalric, anointed of the Lord of Hosts, Protector of the Holy Sepulcher, King of Jerusalem, Count of Jaffa and Ascalon."

Again the trumpets blared. Outside there was the sound of cheering. Then with clashing weapons and clanking mail a host of warriors tramped into the hall, their grim ranks starred with women's finery and many a lovely face. But Matteo's gaze was fastened upon one who walked immediately behind the king and the dark, sour-visaged Grecian queen, a youth whose splendid stature and lion mane of yellow hair were at variance with his boyish counterance.

"See!" whispered Matteo to John the Englishman. "Who is the youth who follows the king?"

"'Tis the Prince Baldwin," returned the old jongleur. "They say he hath qualities beyond any who have borne the name."

"A fair welcome to your graces!" said Bohemond, descending from the dais to offer an arm to the queen.

"Ha, prince, we greet you well!" boomed Amalric in the voice of a man-at-arms, his blond bulk in striking contrast with the swart leanness of Bohemond.

They met as equal sovereigns, for Antioch owed no definite feudal obligation to Jerusalem, nor indeed to any other lord save an occasional Emperor of Constantinople who was prepared to go to the expense of compelling respect. And while they talked upon the dais their two followings were seeking out acquaintances, and a buzz of conversation filled the hall. John the Englishman was hailed by a dozen friends of hard-fought fields.

Matteo hung back, conscious of a recurrence of his former sullen distaste for the whole affair. De Pugne, through loyalty, remained with him, rather than sift about and hark to the gossip of jousts and battles, which he craved.

Matteo marked down de Chappes in the group of lords attending the king and stared at him with squared jaw and lowering eyes.

"I will stay no longer," he said suddenly to de Pugne. "Bide and——"

"But Messer John is just beckoning to you," appealed de Pugne.

It was true, and Matteo could not avoid obeying. The old jongleur turned as he approached.

"Hither, Matteo," he said. "Here is one hath heard of you and must needs command a romaunt."

"Aye, that must I!" exclaimed an eager boy's voice, and Matteo found himself looking into the blue eyes of Prince Baldwin. "By the Cross, Messer Matteo, there is none like you for stirring the blood in my veins with tales of knightly deeds, and my governor, Messer William, the Archdeacon of Tyre, holds that in times to come men will read what you have composed as they do now the learning of the ancient Romans."

"He saith too much," protested Matteo.

"I think not. And will you sing me a romaunt, Messer Matteo? Aye, you shall."

And the boy laughed merrily.

"Ho," he cried in a voice that was almost a man's in timbre, "dear lord, my father—and you, too, Lord Bohemond—I have laid a command upon Messer Matteo, the jongleur, that he sing a romaunt for us."

Bohemond flashed one of his rare smiles at the impetuous lad.

"You know a great jongleur without being instructed, Lord Baldwin," he said. "How say you, lord king, shall we support your fair son? There is none to equal Messer Matteo in Outremer, men say."

"Aye, so," rumbled Amalric. "By my five bones, let him sing. After a good fight there is naught to be preferred to a good song. Stand forth, Messer Matteo."

The lords and ladies drew back, and Matteo found himself in the midst of a circle. He bowed to the three on the dais, and again to the royal boy who had singled him out for favor. By this time he was accustomed to entertaining numerous companies, and he fingered the strings of his gittern with absent-minded precision, considering which of his newer pieces he should select. He chose "The Road to Antioch," one of his *chansons de voyage*, which was then still in process of composition. It began:

"This is the road to Antioch," the merry shipman cried.
"Many a man hath traveled it, and many another died;
  But you and I shall find a lass
  In every tavern that we pass,
And all the robbers by the way will blink at us where'er we stay,
Because we have no bursting packs or clanking harness on our backs,
  But only just a blithesome song
  To while the weary leagues along."

All the incidents of the road he wove into his theme, and his listeners were regaled with the gossip of castle, monastery and tavern, with the opinions of merchants, pilgrims, clerks, villeins, burghers, nobles, great ladies and ladies of questionable virtue, as overheard by himself and the mythical shipman who was the clown of the tale. Laughter intermingled with applause, and the chanson concluded on the note of high endeavor which was dear to a chivalrous company.

"*Pardi*, Messer Jongleur, you sing prettily," applauded King Amalric. "Mayhap my cousin of Antioch will permit that you visit us at Jersualem. Doubt not we shall honor you in your degree."

"I can ill afford to part with Messer Matteo," said Bohemond.

"Ha, fair cousin, but you will let him come in time, will you not?" begged Baldwin. "Certes, he sings like those jongleurs the lords of Provence lament when they come overseas. Doth he not, Messer John?"

"There is none better, lord," agreed John the Englishman gaily, "and I have been a jongleur of some renown in my own day."

"Heed him not, lord," interceded Matteo. "He hath forgotten more romaunts than I know."

"His fame is secure," said Baldwin with friendly impartiality, "as is yours, Messer Matteo, although you are so young. Prithee, visit us at Jerusalem. There is no largesse I could grant you here to represent my appreciation, but in my father's palace I may do better."

"Lord, I have had largesse enough in the kindness of your thoughts," returned Matteo, bowing low; and he withdrew himself apart, anxious to escape the curious eyes that had watched his interview with the prince.

But he could not elude de Pugne. The wily squire sought him out in the niche he found.

"You slip about like an eel," complained François. "Look you, Matteo, who is the *demoiselle* in the yellow gown, she who hath the group of knights and squires about her? Nay, not that one. She is looking this way. Indeed, she hath eyes for none but you. Belike she knows you."

"What *demoiselle* should I know?" retorted Matteo. "Nay, 'tis I who should ask of you."

But he looked in the direction de Pugne indicated, perceived the yellow gown, idly studied the flower face of its wearer—and abruptly realized that she was Brygas de Kergac, the same Brygas, beyond a doubt, who had ridden beside him and cheered his defiance of her guardian and uncle. The same? Yes, but with a difference. This Brygas was slim and lissom as the one he remembered; but there was a poise, a carriage, an assurance of manner that had not been there before.

"You know her!" exclaimed de Pugne in his ear. "My faith, she is the fairest maid ever I saw! Prithee, make me known to her. Is her father a very great lord?"

"I know her, yes," acknowledged Matteo; "But her guardian is my enemy."

"Well, let us go across to her. He is not by at the moment. But who is that squire glowering at her elbow?"

Matteo followed the nod of de Pugne's head. Another surprize! In his absorption he had ignored the presence of Manasses de Chappes, grown into a loutish young man with a spoiled, arrogant face, lacking the ruthless power of his father's.

"Her cousin, an ill-minded fellow," he said as they crossed the hall toward her.

"How, now, Messer Matteo?" she greeted him, while Manasses slouched aside. "Are you grown so great that you have no memories for those who were friends of your obscurity?"

"Not so, lady; and here is my good friend, Messer de Pugne, ready to make amends for my churlishness."

"Messer de Pugne is welcome for himself," she answered sweetly; "but prithee, Messer Matteo, must you rely upon another to save you?"

"I trow not, yet I would have you recall that your uncle is my enemy."

Her face sobered.

"Aye, you would not forget—or forgive. I might have known it."

"I am human," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"So human you must bear malice even against me?"

"Nay, lady; why must you strive to put me in the wrong?" he denied indignantly.

"What say you, Messer de Pugne?" she asked the squire, who had been a silent listener to this debate.

"He is wrong indeed, lady," declared de Pugne.

A group of young knights and squires pressed closer about them as King Amalric and Prince Bohemond left the room for the banquet hall adjoining.

"Who is it presumes to monopolize the Lady Brygas?" demanded one of them. "Ho, de Pugne, I rode with you against Haranc."

"I remember you," replied de Pugne. "This is Messer Matteo de Nerak, the jongleur, my friend——"

"And eke mine," amended Brygas. "What, Messer Jongleur, did I not catch you red-handed in your first adventure?"

"You did, lady," admitted Matteo.

There was a commotion in the outer circle, and Manasses de Chappes forced himself in front of Matteo.

"Perchance your latest adventure is confined to making use of a name to which you have no right," he sneered.

"What mean you?" asked Matteo, even voiced.

"Your friends call you Matteo de Nerak. Since when did you own title to Nerak? Or are you one of the villeins of the fief? If so, by what right are you here?"

"Shame!" cried Brygas.

Others in the group murmured, but Matteo motioned for silence.

"Hear me, messers," he said tensely. "In some sort what this fellow says is true. I have no title in law to Nerak, which was my father's hold. Renier de Chappes permitted the Saracens to burn it and slay my parents——"

"The Saracens avenged the rape of your mother by your father," snarled de Chappes.

"—and when all was safe and I, the orphan, without standing before the law, had fled," continued Matteo as if he had not heard the interruption, "he secured the fief from the king. He did not win it, messers. He sat by and saw a braver lord slaughtered so that he might expand his lands.

"Nerak is his today. It is not mine, and from this day I am no longer Matteo de Nerak. I am Matteo d'Antioch."

He swung around upon de Chappes.

"Art satisfied?" he inquired.

" 'Tis a sign you begin to realize your place," conceded Manasses contemptuously.

"Nay, I am not finished with you," said Matteo, smiling. "By this buffet, am I not!"

And he struck Manasses across the mouth so fiercely that he reeled to the floor.

"Ah, dear God!" beseeched Brygas. "Do not fight with him, Messer Matteo! You have naught to win by it."

"I have a long-awaited revenge to satisfy," returned Matteo grimly.

"Nay, nay, you are mad!"

Manasses jumped up, purple with rage.

"You know well I would not fight with a Saracen dog like you!" he yelped. "I may not soil my steel upon your bastard hide."

Matteo turned to the group surrounding them.

"What say you, messers?" he asked.

"You are in the right so far, Messer Matteo," declared the young knight who had recognized de Pugne. "I am Allier de St. Roque, and I ride with the Lord Balian d'Ibelin."

"Why should I fight him?" protested Manasses. "He is not of knightly blood."

"He is of better blood than you," cried de Pugne, "and if you do not fight him I will whip you from the city."

Brygas stood weeping and wringing her hands.

"He will fight," promised the young knight, de St. Roque.

"What talk of fighting do I hear?" cut in a new voice, and Prince Baldwin thrust a path into the heart of the group.

At his heels strode John the Englishman, a worried look on his lined face.

" 'Tis I have challenged Messer de Chappes," spoke up Matteo.

"You, Messer de Nerak? And why?"

"For that Messer de Chappes challenged my honor, and my right to the name de Nerak. The last I conceded to him. Henceforth I am Matteo d'Antioch."

"Yet still I do not understand the bicker," said Baldwin, bewildered.

"If it please you, lord," interrupted John the Englishman, "Messer Matteo is son to the former lord of Nerak."

"Ha, so! I perceive the merits of the case," said Baldwin softly.

A harsh, bleak look covered his blond features. Their immaturity vanished as by magic.

"The point was not a knightly one to take, Messer de Chappes," he said curtly. "You disgrace my father's court. Prithee, retire to the fleet at St. Simeon, there to await our coming."

De Chappes squared his shoulders and strove to effect a jaunty air as he left the room, but none of his comrades gave him so much as a glance of sympathy.

"As for you, Messer Matteo," continued the prince with a hint of reproval, "you are wise enough to know that it could not have advanced your fortunes had you slain a guest of Prince Bohemond on a festival day. Nay, I blame you not, but consider my words and be guarded accordingly."

He put his hand on the arm of John the Englishman in sign that he wished to retire. The ranks of the group opened before him, and he walked beside the old jongleur to the banquet hall.

"There passes a king," said Brygas, "and one who hath been a good friend to you, Messer Matteo d'Antioch. You do well to change your name. 'Tis worthy of the place you have won by your own efforts, as becometh a valiant knight."

"Yet I am no knight," protested Matteo.

"Knighthood is not confined to gilded spurs, nor doth it require the stroke of the accolade to impart its virtues," she answered gently. "Am I not right, Messer de St. Roque?"

He bowed over her hand.

"Those very words were instilled into my mind by my dear Lord Balian," he replied. "I count Messer Matteo d'Antioch—or de

Nerak—or whatever else he chooses to call himself—my friend."

Others murmured assent and extended their hands to Matteo.

"We are of the native-born," declared a squire. "We weary of the pretensions of foreign adventurers like de Chappes."

"A truce to politics," laughed Brygas. "Am not I, too, an adventurer?"

"Nay, nay," they answered her. "You are the Queen of Beauty!"

It seemed to Matteo an apt title. His heart beat faster as he heard it.

"Aye, so shall you be," he said, bending his knee to her; "and I do proclaim you as such in this realm of Antioch eke Jerusalem, with countship and wardship, baronage and admiralty, over all who love and woo."

A warm light blazed in her eyes as she leaned down and smote him lightly on the shoulder.

"Rise, Messer Matteo," she bade him. "You are knight to my grace, and as first jongleur of Outremer shall be charged with due proclamation of all loving encounters and chronicling of such passages at hearts as may ensue."

The knights and squires clapped their hands and applauded.

"A right merry wit," they confided one to another.

"Certes this Messer Matteo is a proper person even though he be a bastard, as de Chappes hath charged," said de St. Roque to de Pugne.

"He is as good a man of his hands as he is of his voice," replied François. "But never before did I see him permit a woman to cozen him."

There was a hint of jealousy in these last words. The young knight laughed.

"It comes in time to all," he said. " 'Tis like a romaunt of his own. I would give much to see the face of Messer Renier when he hears what hath happed this day."

CHAPTER XIII

TO MASSIAF

IT WAS after the banquet that night that John the Englishman came to Matteo's chamber.

"What madness possessed you, fair son?" he asked gently. "Thanks to St. George, I overheard, in passing, the bicker betwixt you and that varlet de Chappes, and fetched Prince Baldwin to end it in the only way possible."

" 'Twould have been best had I fought and slain him," replied Matteo sullenly.

"How would that have advanced you? Bohemond must have banished you from his court, at the least. You are on the threshold of great fame. Why defer your recognition?"

"But they are my enemies, Messer John! Some day I must slay them."

"Alack!" sighed the old jongleur wearily. "There is that in the blood of the folk of this wild land which breeds hate and intemperance. Whither will your revenge carry you?"

"I know not," admitted Matteo.

"Aye, you know not. Mayhap, if you do not learn in time revenge hath a sour savor in the mouth, 'twill carry you whither you like not."

"Even so shall I not make sorrow," retorted Matteo. "I have been thinking the nonce of taking my case to King Amalric."

"To what purpose?"

"I would demand my rights."

"Nay, but what are your rights, Matteo?"

Matteo tossed himself into a chair, fuming with rage.

"Have I none, then?" he demanded.

"None, lad. Even the treasures the merchant in Tripoli holds for you you may be sure of principally because you wear the ring of Sinan."

"Would the king deny me all justice?" cried Matteo.

"Not justice, but rights. Aye, for even if the king heard you, his barons would resist yielding up a border fortress to you."

" 'Tis unfair——"

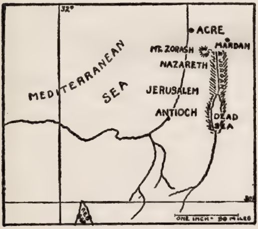
"Unfair and wicked, I grant you, lad—and no fault of yours. Yet 'tis fact. You must face it as fact."

Matteo tossed slumberless through the night, but in the morning and throughout the brief visit of the court of Jerusalem he took pains to avoid his enemies, with entire success, since Manasses was in disgrace aboard the royal galleys at the port of St. Simeon, and Messer Renier was occupied with affairs of state.

But of Brygas and the young Prince Baldwin he saw much, and he found equal joy in the feminine charm of one and the frank admiration of the other. The charm of Brygas was elusive in quality, vague, disturbing for one who had been unobservant of women outside the pages of manuscript scrolls and the gestes and romaunts of brother jongleurs.

When she departed at the end of the week Matteo was conscious of an emptiness in his life that he had never known before, yet it was an emptiness without pain, and in the swift progress of events, the sweep and pomp and pageantry of the court, the occasional clash of war on the marches, he had no time to lament the loss of a girl who, after all, he thought of always as the niece of a mortal enemy.

So passed another year. The influence Matteo had secured over the sinister Bohemond won him additional fame. Lords and knights came to Antioch especially to hear this matchless jongleur with the golden voice. Other jongleurs and trouveres journeyed to compare notes with him and his master, John the Englishman, or perchance, in jealousy, to seek to oust him from his dominance of their art. Bohemond delighted to honor him as an ornament of the court. He had all that youth can desire—all save love, and he was not assured in his mind that he desired love.



The court of Antioch vied with Jerusalem as a center of chivalry. It was a training school for knights, and in its lists Matteo was hardened in feats of arms. For he did not confine himself to service in the palace any more than did John the Englishman, whose counsel in war was sought by the wiliest leaders. If the Saracens raided from Aleppo or the Armenians from Mamestra the jongleurs rode with the host in the Assize of Arms.

It was in the beginning of the fourth year of Matteo's sojourn at Antioch that Ali Ma'akwaa came to him in perturbation one morning with a sealed roll of parchment.

"One in a cloak slipped by me in the palace court and placed this in my hand," said the old Turcople. "He said 'twas for my master. Before I could question him he was gone."

Matteo turned the roll in his hand. The seal was of black wax and stamped upon it was the device of the hand grasping the triple-bladed knife.

"Why did you not follow?" he asked.

"I did, but there was a crowd."

"Belike it matters not," said Matteo, and slit the seal.

The script was in Arabic:

> Sinan, Lord of Death, Sheikh-al-Jebal, Master of Paradise, Deliverer of the Word, to the jongleur Matteo of Antioch, once of Nerak in the land beyond Jordan, Greeting, in the name of the Unknown:
>
> The hour hath arrived when a measure of the vengeance contemplated may be achieved and power added to that which a certain ring hath aided in procuring. Death shall be the portion of those who are your enemies and mine and those of the lord you serve. To this end you shall wait upon me at the Castle of Massiaf. Let no time be lost in obeying my summons.
>
> This is the word of Sinan.

"Is it evil tidings, Messer Matteo?" asked Ali.

"Nay, I know not," replied Matteo thoughtfully. "Perchance it means a worthy adventure. It bodes death for some. But I must seek speech with the prince and Messer John."

He found the two playing at chess, and Bohemond studied the message eagerly, as always, hungry for the unusual, for aught that would divert his somber mind.

"You cannot interpret its meaning?" he asked finally.

"Nay, lord."

"What think you, John?" inquired the prince, handing the parchment to him.

The old jongleur read it twice, then glanced keenly at Matteo.

"What is your thought?" he asked.

Matteo shrugged his shoulders.

" 'Tis an opportunity for adventure," he said. "I have had experience of the power of Sinan, as you wot. I am interested to test it further."

John the Englishman nodded his head.

"Much have I heard of this enchanted castle of Massiaf," he remarked, "but never have I met the man who could truthfully say he had set eyes upon it. Many a foray have the Templars dispatched into the country of the Assassins to seek it out, but never have they glimpsed its turrets. So far may a Christian ride alive through these mountains. A league beyond he is a corpse, save he turn back."

"My counsel, lord, is that you permit Matteo to obey."

"Aye," agreed the prince. "for 'tis in my mind that he should have a rare tale to tell upon his return. How will you go, Matteo?"

"Certes, I know not."

"Massiaf, by all reports," interrupted John the Englishman, "is in the mountains of Lebanon inland from Jebleh. You must be wary of the Templars, Matteo, for they would slay even you did they suspect you of traffic with Sinan. The prince's safe-conduct would not protect you in such a case."

"I will use care, dear lord, and if I live I will make a new geste for you, lord prince, that you shall not soon tire of."

The chess-board was abandoned, and the prince and John the Englishman vied with each other to aid in the hurried preparations that Matteo found necessary. Ali was overjoyed at the prospect of bearding the Old Man of the Mountain in his castle, for, to say truth, the old Turcople often grew tired of the ordered routine of the palace and the confinement of Antioch's walls. His idea of a happy life was a border keep with frequent excursions against the enemy, a free hand at plunder and death ever riding at his saddle-bow.

"By St. Bacchus and Allah, who ought to be a saint!" he exclaimed as they rode out of the palace courtyard, followed by the envious farewells of de Pugne—now a full-fledged knight—and others of the court, "This is the best venture ever we have been upon, Messer Matteo, and it shall go ill with us if we do not win rich booty."

"We are not after booty, old wolf," laughed Matteo. "We are riding into the jaws of death to match wits with one who calls himself the Lord of Death. If we win free with life and a new song to sing, I shall be satisfied."

"Each to his liking," grumbled Ali. "You would take a song instead of a gold bangle any day."

They rode out by the river gate, and followed a road leading southward, parallel to the coast, but some seven or eight leagues inland. They had not traveled far when they caught up with a man dressed as an Italian merchant, who rode one pony and led another carrying well-stuffed paniers.

"A fair day, lord," he hailed them.

"Fair enough," returned Matteo shortly, not desirous of intercourse with a stranger.

But the man kneed his pony over to their side of the road.

"You ride to Jebleh?" he asked.

"In that direction," admitted Matteo.

"'Tis a parlous stretch, lord. Will you lend me the grace of your company for your own sake as well as mine?"

"Nay," denied Matteo, "I know you not. On the road the stranger is not always the friend."

"Why, that is wisely spoken, but are you sure that I am a stranger?"

Matteo stared at the man's dark, shrewd features.

"Your face means nothing to me," he said.

"Think again," urged the man. "'Twas not in Antioch, lord."

"I have never seen you before," insisted Matteo.

"But you have," persisted the merchant. "Not garbed in this wise, but——"

He broke off, and peered at Matteo askance with a queer contortion of his features that stirred a sleeping memory.

"Think," he continued, "three years ago, and more. A fair day in Spring like this. A barren hillside, and one who fled and men in armor who pursued."

In a flash the strange face became familiar.

"The Assassin who fled to the desert!" cried Matteo. "You are Kafur!"

The "Italian merchant" bowed.

"Kafur, Messer Matteo. I see you still wear the ring I gave you."

Matteo twitched the heavy silver circlet with its impressive device.

"Have you come to ask it back?" he demanded.

"Not so, lord. A gift is a gift. Nay, I rode this way because one whispered in my ear that you were riding to Massiaf. And the way to Massiaf is fraught with frequent dangers for those who have never ridden it before."

"I am riding toward Jebleh," returned Matteo doubtfully.

"And if you will take the advice of one

who means you well you will not continue to Jebleh."

"Why?"

"Because that way you can not avoid encountering patrols of the Templars, who think they guard skilfully the approaches to my master's land."

"Your master?"

"Even so. The Old One. He whose message, I doubt not, you carry in your wallet. I travel this road, Messer Matteo, at his behest to see that you come to no harm."

"Then you are to be responsible for our safety?"

"Aye, lord. Ask me no more. The brotherhood of which I am a member work in secret by devious ways. You will understand more before you see Antioch again."

"But first answer me this," proposed Matteo. "Why does Sinan wish me to come to Massiaf?"

"'Twould be death to answer," said Kafur quickly. "Wait, and you shall hear it from his lips."

"But——"

"Lord, I know not. I might not tell you, if I would."

"There is none to overhear you."

The Assassin looked around him with a shudder of apprehension.

"Sinan hears everything," he answered. "In the midst of the desert you could not talk unheard."

"A lord of vast powers," commented Matteo with sarcasm.

"Far vaster than you reckon."

"Yet he fears the Templars beyond all bounds!"

"Aye, because if he slays one grand master they elect another and to celebrate it destroy one of his out-lying borderholds."

An hour's ride to the south they came to a point where the road forked, one arm turning westward to the coast, the other following a line of hills overlooking the valley of the Orontes.

"Had you followed the coast road, Messer Matteo," said the Assassin, pointing to the west, "you would have been caught by the Templars. This other path climbs to Massiaf by passes the Templars have never been able to enter."

That night they slept in a peasant's hut. The next day they traversed a wild and desolate country, which became ruggedly mountainous as they pressed on. Once Kafur left the path for a rocky ravine to avoid a troop of spears they saw issuing from a small castle overhanging the cliffs ahead.

"But they are Christians," objected Matteo. "Why should we fear them?"

"Because you are not in Christian company," replied Kafur with a gleam of teeth.

The second night they encamped by a mountain-stream without a fire, and the wolves howled around them until dawn. They had not been long on their way in the morning when they heard cries from a near-by hillside, and a body of mountaineers in goatskin garments raced toward them with bow-strings taut.

"Shall we charge or fly?" asked Matteo, as he and Ali drew their swords.

"For your lives, do neither," returned Kafur. "They are my people. The watchers of the passes."

As the mountaineers approached, he took from one of his packs a replica of the grotesque triple-bladed knife which was carved on Matteo's ring. He held it high above his head, and the watchers stopped in their tracks.

"The Sign of Death!" they cried. "Pass, friends of the Old One."

Three times afterward they were assailed by savage bands at different points in the passes. Twice on the distant horizon Matteo beheld the towers of fortalices whose strength seemed to lie rather in unassailable locations than in size. But not once did they see a house or a hovel or any indication of human occupancy, not even animals or cultivated fields.

"How do your people live?" questioned Matteo in bewilderment.

"That is our secret," said Kafur with his ready smile. "They do not lack for anything. They are so happy that they weep when they must go away."

"Go away?"

"Obey the orders of the Old One," he explained.

"And what are his orders?"

"Nay, Messer Matteo, you ask too many questions. Perchance you shall learn from the Old One, himself, if he chooses."

Matteo was about to answer in pique when the Assassin seized him by the arm.

"See!" he said. "There is Massiaf!"

They were on the crest of the pass, and leagues away across the mountains loomed a soaring pile of towers, battlements and pinnacles, limned against the blue of the horizon line like some fairy stronghold that would vanish at the waving of a wand.

"Is it far?" asked Matteo, moved, despite himself, by the glamour of the picture.

"Another day's ride," rejoined Kafur, and he added enigmatically: "Few have been anxious to reach it. And fewer still have been ready to leave it when the hour came."

CHAPTER XIV

THE GARDEN OF DELIGHT

THE towers of Massiaf faded into the twilight as they descended the opposite side of the pass. It was not until the afternoon of the next day that they saw it again, sitting so serenely in the sky, almost as if it belonged to another world.

Drawing nearer, hour by hour, Matteo realized that it was much larger than he had at first supposed. Wall and turret, bartizan and bailey, the structure soared above the mountain peak it crowned, not one, but a succession of superimposed fortifications, like a town rather than a castle.

The country at its foot was as bleak and inhospitable as any they had crossed in their journey, black rocks and stunted trees and no crops growing in the few patches of earth that lay in folds of the cliffs. No man appeared to watch them pass; no curious eyes looked down from the battlements as they reached the deep, dry moat that yawned before the lower wall a short distance up the mountain's flank.

" 'Tis like a castle of the jinn!" muttered Ali, crossing himself.

"Your Christianity is but skin deep," jeered Matteo, himself none too comfortable. "There are no such things as jinn."

"Mayhap, but here is evil or I never saw wickedness. 'Tis not human! Mark the size of the hold—and never a human to be seen! Who but Satan could rule in such a place?"

"Our guide is not concerned," said Matteo, pointing to Kafur, who rode phlegmatically in front of them.

"Aye, for he is Satan's familiar, I begin to think, Messer Matteo."

"The saints forbid! But see! They lower the draw."

Without a hail from Kafur, without a trumpet-blast or challenge from the bare walls, the ponderous mass of the drawbridge began to drop across the moat ahead of them. It settled into place with a flick of dust, and Kafur turned in his saddle and beckoned Matteo and Ali to follow him. As their horses' hoofs rang on the planks, Matteo craned his head upward, expecting to surprize some sly watcher at loophole or machicoulation. But there was not a sign of human occupancy. The walls and towers stretched around the mountainside, white and vacant beneath the lowering sun.

He peered forward under the shadows of the arch of the gateway. There, too, was emptiness. No guards awaited them; no sentries appeared. Their horses' hoofs rumbled in the archway. Behind them there was a clang, and Matteo looked back hastily to see the portcullis dropped in place. The draw, itself, commenced to rise again, noiselessly, without a hint of machinery or human hands. He shuddered. A fear akin to that which Ali had expressed stole over him. This place was eery, uncanny. He forced himself to address a remark to Kafur as they emerged from the gateway arch into a stone-paved courtyard.

"Your lord is not dowered with many servants, it seems."

"Nay, his servants are many, but discreet."

"Will they condescend to take our horses?" inquired Matteo sarcastically.

"In time. We have yet some distance to ride."

They passed through a gateway in the opposite wall of the courtyard which stood open, and found themselves upon a zigzagging ramp of stone, barred at intervals by gates and lined with loopholed walls, which climbed the mountainside toward the enchanted pile of the castle proper. The defenses they had so far seen were only outworks.

Up and up, they toiled, their horses plodding steadily on the cobbled way. No sound of voices, no clashing of weapons, no smell of cooking, reached them. They might have been in the Land of the Dead for all the visible evidence of life that was afforded them. The clicking of hoofs and the creaking of saddles echoed prodigiously between the long white walls that lined the ramp. Occasionally they came to a window in the walls through which they might view the wild tangle of mountains they had passed, no less desolate than this Castle of Emptiness.

Yet Matteo fancied that unseen eyes

were watching him. He had a sensation as if all about him sentient life was teeming, held in check by some master will. He felt as though any moment a thousand voices might shriek a savage war-cry, and he knew that if they did his straining nerves must break.

But nothing happened. Instead, they came into a second courtyard immediately below the wide-ranging cluster of towers which capped the peak. From doorways in its walls stepped immense negro slaves, clad in spotless white waist-cloths, who helped them to dismount and then led the horses away, all without a single word or even unnecessary gesture.

"If it please you, Messer Matteo, follow me," said Kafur.

"It matters not whether it pleases me," retorted Matteo. "The bird in the trap must do as the trapper lists."

Kafur stopped before an iron gate in the wall, one hand raised to strike a pendant gong beside it.

"Nay, you are free," he said. "But say the word, and I will summon back your horses and you may depart."

Matteo hesitated, half of a mind to put the statement to the test.

"Sinan hath no use for those who fear aught," added Kafur impartially. "If you would go, you had best go before 'tis too late."

"Who said that I fear?" demanded Matteo with heat.

He strode to the gate, and smote the gong with his sword-hilt. The gate swung open by a chain which ran through a hole in the stonework.

"Lead on," he said. "And remember, whoever you are, I fear nothing that the hand can touch or the eye see."

Kafur salaamed, with a twinkle of mirth in his eye.

"Your pardon, lord. Your servant's words were ill chosen. None the less, 'tis true that you are still at liberty to go back, if you wish. 'Tis for you to choose."

"I have chosen."

"So be it."

He led them through a long tunnel into a third courtyard which was planted with trees and shrubs, embellished with tinkling fountains and rare mosaics of stone and statues deftly carven, which Matteo knew must have been the handiwork of the ancient artisans of the East.

In the arcade which formed a quadrangle about the court he halted and clapped his hands twice. Three blacks ran forward from some unseen entrance, and stood before them with heads bowed and arms crossed on their breasts.

"You will require rest and refreshment, Messer Matteo," said Kafur. "These are your slaves. They will bring you whatever you wish."

"I thought I came hither to see Sinan," objected Matteo.

"So you did, lord, but you are weary."

"Nay, I am as ready now as I shall be later," insisted Matteo.

"Sinan will be glad to hear of your zeal," replied Kafur, smoothly evasive. "There is time for you to rest and eat."

With that he turned upon his heel and vanished, giving Matteo no time for further objections. One of the negroes lifted Matteo's hand to his forehead, and motioned to the far side of the quadrangle.

"There is naught for it but to go whither we are led," quoth Matteo resignedly. "For good or ill, we are here, and must do as we are bid, Ali."

"Aye, Messer Matteo, and keep our swords handy," returned the old Turcople craftily. "At the least, these blacks are humans, which is proof the place hath other than jinn to garrison it."

The negroes conducted them up a narrow stair in the wall to a chamber both large and high, with windows overlooking the court. Adjoining it was a bath, and laying aside their armor and soiled garments, Matteo and Ali enjoyed a plunge in the cool waters, which flowed in and out of vents in the marble walls.

"Whoever he may be, this Sinan must possess as much wealth as Prince Bohemond," suggested Ali, as they dried themselves and one of the negroes draped them in flowing robes of silken materials.

"And magic gardens, too, it would seem," remarked Matteo, stepping into their chamber, where the other two slaves were arranging a low table set with a wealth of fruits and meats, with flasks and flagons of wine in buckets of snow.

"Whence comes this profusion?" he asked in the Saracen tongue.

The blacks smiled to show they understood and opened their mouths, pointing at the mutilated stumps of their tongues.

"Mutes!" exclaimed Ali. "'Tis no wonder the place is so quiet!"

They sat on cushions by the table, and the blacks served them swiftly with all that they wished. As evening drew on, bronze lamps were lighted. Once Matteo walked to the windows and looked out. The courtyard was dark. Not a sound drifted up to him, but the pattering of the fountain.

After that he had no desire to move. A drowsy feeling stole over him. The wine was heady and sweet; the slaves kept his cup always full. Still, he thought, it was strange that he should yield to its effects so early, he who was accustomed to the carouses of Bohemond's court.

"Ali," he said with an effort. "Doth the wine ring in your head?"

Ali, who had been silent since his second cup, quaffed a flagon with the practised ease of an old campaigner.

"Nay, lord, 'tis not the wine," he anwered thickly.

"What, then?"

" 'Tis hashish, Messer Matteo. Aye, hashish. Sinan's folk have their name of Assassins from hashish. They—use—the—drug——"

"How? What—say—you?" demanded Matteo, as his follower's reply trailed off into nothingness.

"Hashish — Hashishans — Assassins," muttered the Turcople.

Matteo struggled to rise to his feet, to walk around the table; but he seemed to have leaden weights binding him down. And while his head did not hurt, it was heavy. He was conscious that it kept falling forward on his chest.

"Ali!" he called again.

There was no answer.

"Treachery!" murmured Matteo to himself. "Kill—knaves!"

He started to crawl on his hands and knees to the divan where he had left his sword, but as he leaned forward his head dropped and he could not raise it again. He was vaguely aware of being lifted by the blacks and carried to this very divan. As he sank into the cushions he stretched his hand out for the sword-hilt—and a great darkness blanketed his mind, a darkness that was animate in its luxurious denseness, in the delicious languor it inspired.

In that first moment of his awaking Matteo lay with his eyes half-closed, drinking in the fragrance of the perfumes that drifted on the air and the subdued melodies, almost as intangible as the odors of the flowers, which were wafted to his ears. It was good to lie, inert, effortless, betwixt the worlds, as it were, and take joy in the pleasantness of his surroundings. But after a while a sense of uneasiness possessed him. There was something he did not understand in his position. That soft music was subtly disturbing in its low, insistent play of passion. That——

He heard a movement near him, and suddenly sat up.

"Ali!" he called.

Ali did not answer, and Matteo searched the room with dazed, perplexed eyes. Yes, there was Ali, reposing on a couch like his own, a kind of cushioned litter. But the room was not that in which they had feasted the night before. It was more open, sunlight poured in on three sides.

"What does my lord wish?" asked a gentle voice behind him. "You have only to name it."

Matteo swung his feet to the marble floor and looked around. A girl in a costume of shimmering, transparent stuffs, girdled with a belt of golden disks, stood smiling down upon him. She was dark, with long, sheeny black hair and tawny brown eyes, and the rich tints of her rounded limbs gleamed through her draperies.

"Who are you?" he said dumbly.

"Your slave."

"Where am I?"

"In Paradise, lord."

"In Paradise!" He shook his head slowly. "Nay, maiden, tell me, in sooth. Where am I?"

"Said I not 'in Paradise', lord? But if you like another name better, why not call it the Garden of Delight?"

Matteo regarded her blankly. She was very fair, and her surroundings were of appropriate cast.

"Last night I entered the castle of Sinan, Lord of the Assassins," he said slowly. "We feasted—and slept."

"And today you are in Paradise, lord," she replied brightly. "Are you not fortunate among men?"

"I do not know," he said.

She came close to him.

"Are you not pleased with me, lord?" she asked frankly.

"Pleased?"

"Aye, lord. I should like to please you, but if I do not, mayhap, some one of my sisters shall be more fortunate."

She started to clap her hands.

"Nay," said Matteo quickly. "I meant no discourtesy, maiden. But my follower—why does he not awake?"

"He shall," she promised, and slipping across the chamber, blew lightly upon Ali's eyes.

The old Turcople yawned heavily, extended his sinewy frame, rolled from side to side, opened his eyes—and sat up.

"What—what—" he gasped.

"Aye, what?" returned Matteo grimly, speaking in the Frankish tongue.

"Will my lord take food?" interposed the girl.

"Yes," said Matteo, glad of the opportunity to be rid of her.

She made a salaam, embraced him and Ali in a dazzling smile and left the room.

"Where are we, Messer Matteo?" inquired the Turcople, trying his feet to the floor to make sure it was real.

"You are in Paradise, Ali, according to my fair informant, who, it seems, is one of the houris."

"It can not be," denied Ali practically. "We are Christians, lord. Paradise is not for us."

The girl who had awakened them reappeared at this moment ushering in a procession of other damsels, all as fair as herself, all draped in the sheer fabrics which only masked their dainty figures. They carried a number of trays of food, and each smiled whole-heartedly upon the two men.

"Your slaves are delighted to serve you," said the girl who had first appeared.

Ali stared until his eyes almost popped out of his head.

"If this be Paradise, lord, we are in it by mistake," he spluttered.

"It may be Heaven," suggested Matteo amusedly.

"Nay, nay, lord. Heaven is not like this. This is Allah's Paradise, and if Allah finds us here he will call in a pair of Afrits and bid them carry us down to Eblis, which is Hell, and very much like the Christians' Hell, I think."

"What does the old man say?" asked the leader of the damsels.

"He says that we are Christians and have no place in Allah's Paradise," replied Matteo with a smile. "He thinks that we shall be carried down to Eblis by the Afrits."

The girl and her companions broke into pearly bursts of laughter.

"It is true we have seldom had Christians in the Garden," said the one who had attached herself to Matteo. "But upon occasion Allah sees fit to honor some, and we, who are his houris and the slaves of all true believers who are favored of Allah, do what we may to make their stays agreeable to them."

"Their stays?" repeated Matteo. "Once arrived in Paradise, do the favored ever depart?"

She arranged the trays before him, and caressed his shoulder with a hand like a rose bloom.

"You ask too many questions, lord," she smiled. "Eat, and prithee, be merry."

So, being hungered, he ate, as did Ali, and the damsels attended them, quick to anticipate their wants.

"What else do we do, besides eat and drink, in Paradise?" queried Matteo at last.

"Whatsoever you will, lord."

Matteo looked whimsically at Ali.

"Let us inspect Paradise. What say you, Ali?"

"Aye, Messer Matteo," the Turcople agreed readily.

The damsels clustered about them with willowy grace.

"Do you come with us, lord," directed the leader. "Your domain lies ready for you."

She took his hand in hers, and the others danced ahead as she guided him out upon a portico in front of the chamber in which they had awakened. Ali followed, rubbing his eyes very hard.

CHAPTER XV

TEMPTATION

MATTEO caught his breath at the exotic beauty of the scene.

"Certes, 'tis Paradise!" stammered Ali.

They stood in an open courtyard, sunk below the level of the surrounding ground. It was embowered in flowers. Gorgeous roses blossomed in every open space; vines and creepers covered the walls and stonework with a net of luscious greenery; ferns and dwarf cypresses, gnarled olive trees, broad patches of lotus blooms, a score of colorful plants Matteo could not name, crowded the perspective of the garden.

At the far end a silvery cascade foamed its way down a series of troughs in the midst of a flight of marble stairs and dropped in one last ecstatic leap into a long pool which ran through the center of the courtyard to their feet. Beyond the steps, a broad expanse of greensward, dotted with forest trees, stretched to the lichen-covered cliffs which blocked the vista.

Behind the house from which they had emerged were other gardens like the one before them, set with pavilions of similar architecture in the Arabian style, roofs swelling into bulbous domes, tiled with a myriad contrasting hues, latticed windows to shut out the sun-glare, arched balconies and porches. At intervals fountains threw their spray high in air. Between the buildings thick clumps of jade-green cypresses towered aloft, and in the background the valley was sealed by a tremendous wall, which reared its granite courses more than a hundred feet above their heads without a single opening.

The sides of the valley, Matteo perceived, sloped gradually for a short distance, and then ascended perpendicularly in cliffs which seemed to furnish architraves for the fleecy clouds that floated over them. The air was balmy with the odor of flowers; the delicate music which had stirred Matteo's senses upon awaking, pulsed in their ears; song birds linked the strains with the harmonies of nature; the splashing of the fountains and the tinkling of the cascades throbbed through the medley of sound and color.

"If this be not Paradise, then Paradise can not be more fair," he said gravely. "Damsel, how came we to this place?"

She smote him lightly across the mouth with the petals of her fingers.

"Said I not you asked too many questions, lord?" she chided, merry-eyed. "In the Garden of Delight, which is Paradise for ordinary mortals, if not for Frankish jongleurs, we do not ask or answer questions."

"What do you, then?"

"We live—and play—and dance—and love."

"But your pursuits do not interest me at this moment," objected Matteo. "I came hither on an errand of vengeance."

She surveyed him archly.

"You are full young to be so stern, lord. And the old one with you?"

"I am, as you say, an old one," rejoined Ali Ma'akwaa sturdily. "For the rest, I think as my master does."

"Nay, we shall make trial of you," she said.

Before Matteo could answer, she glided from his side, with a wave of command to her attendants. The unseen music shifted to a livelier theme, and the houris whirled into the measures of a posturing dance. Muslin draperies clung and fell loose with the energy of movement; unshod feet seemed to spurn the velvet grass; weaving arms and wind-borne tresses were a diadem of ivory and ebony.

The music quickened. Faster and faster spun the dancers, backward and forward, forward and back. They floated about the two men, now close, now in swift retreat. A lock of scented hair whipped Matteo's cheek; white arms invited him. The music rose to a crescendo. The dancers worked themselves to a pitch of frenzy—a cloud of tumultuous draperies, a confusion of gleaming limbs, pouting lips and refulgent eyes.

Snap! The music ended. The dancers, poised in air, fell forward on their faces, all save the leader. She wavered forward like a weary bubble of foam, and collapsed against Matteo, her body slipping through his reluctant arms until he was obliged to clasp her to him. She tossed back the torrent of her hair, and looked up at him with her head upon his shoulder.

"How, now, lord?" she murmured. "Is this a place for asking questions?"

He bent to meet her lips. Her tawny eyes smiled into his, dewy and emotional.

"I know not," he said. "You are very fair."

He felt himself sinking into the pools of her eyes.

"I am yours, lord."

"Houri or not, you are——"

His arms tightened about her convulsively, so that she cried out. In the mirror of her iris, rimmed by the opalescent whites, fringed by long, black lashes, he seemed to see reflected the picture of a lissom maiden, with red-gold hair, astride a racing black horse. The picture framed itself and vanished in the blinking of an eyelid.

He gasped, and his arms released her. She floated from him, puzzled, a rebellious frown on her face.

"I do not find favor in my lord's sight," she said sullenly.

He stared at her, uncomprehending.

"I may not," he answered slowly. "Your pleasures are not for me, lady."

The half-circle of dancers leaped lithely to their feet, rearranging their filmy raiment, eying Matteo and their leader with ill-concealed wonder.

"How say you, Messer Matteo?" spoke up Ali. "They seem to fancy us. Shall we——"

Matteo turned upon him.

"I know not what this means," he said, using the Frank tongue. "But do not respond to their advances. This is no more Paradise than it is Antioch. 'Tis some hellish plot of Sinan's."

"What?"

The Turcople's mouth gaped wide.

"Last night," pursued Matteo swiftly, "did you not tell me you suspected we had been fed with hashish?"

"So I did, Messer Matteo. I had forgotten."

"By the saints, that explains it all! We have been drugged, and carried to some pleasure garden of Sinan's to be cozened into readiness to submit ourselves to his will!"

"Mayhap, but, touching what the damsel said about Paradise——"

"Take thought to your wits, Ali! As you said in the beginning, how could two professing Christians gain entrance to Allah's Paradise? And did you ever hear priest describe Heaven like to this?"

"Nay," admitted the Turcople unwillingly. "Yet I see not why Sinan should indulge us with his harem, which I take it you suppose this to be."

"I suppose nothing I do not know."

Matteo turned upon the leader of the houris.

"Damsel," he said, "I would not have you think me unkind, but I am in no mood for dalliance. I would ask no fairer lady than yourself to idle away the hours, but——"

She laughed sweetly as a chiming bell.

"Certes, fair lord, you are the first to enter the Garden of Delight who refused its courtesies. But this day is young, and others will follow, and you will soon see the writing of Kismet on the wall. Do not forget me. You are different from other men, and I could love well one who is not too easily tempted."

"But if this is Paradise I shall be here always, and will you not serve me alone?" asked Matteo, smiling.

"Yours I shall be, and yours alone, if you desire it, so long as Allah wills."

"Then I may be cast forth from Paradise?"

She laughed, and all her attendants joined with her in the echoing peal.

"Here may return all who desire, and who will pay the price," she replied.

"What price?"

"I know not."

"Would you serve me?" he tried her.

"Gladly, lord."

She leaned toward him eagerly.

"I have business in Massiaf. How may I go thence?"

Disappointment clouded her face.

"Here we have naught to do with Massiaf."

"But how may I go there? At least, tell me that?"

"Nay," she returned. "None may leave the Garden—without permission."

"Whose permission?"

"His—Allah's, Kismet's. Name him as you please."

"But who will prevent our departure?"

"The guardians."

"Who are they?"

"See for yourself, lord."

And she waved a slim arm toward the huge wall of masonry that blocked the exit from the valley.

"Zounds, I will!" exclaimed Matteo. "Come, Ali!"

"Is there to be a fight?" inquired Ali interestedly.

"We have no weapons. Still——"

The houris joined in mocking laughter.

"There will be no fight," said the leader. "Go and look upon the guardians. When you return we shall be awaiting you. Perchance we may find other means of diverting you, we who have not been so fortunate as to win your approval."

They danced away around the opposite side of the pavilion, gauzy tunics eddying in the mild breeze, raven locks cloaking their loveliness, voices chanting an elfin snatch of song.

"Messer Matteo," said the old Turcople quite seriously, "why should we go to talk with these guardians or seek to leave this place before we must? I have been a man-at-arms all my life, and certes, I never saw a fairer house or more beautiful women. Let us bide here, and take pleasure as we may."

"And bow to Sinan's will," amended Matteo. "You are seasoned in war, and you know 'tis folly to do that which your opponent wishes you to do. Sinan is now in some sort our enemy. He hath put us here for reasons of his own. To begin with, he hath sent for me. When I come to Massiaf, instead of seeing me, he drugs me and hath me removed hither. Why? I say again, Ali, it can be only because he aims to make of me—and you—his tool."

Ali shrugged his shoulders, unconvinced.

"You are my lord, Messer Matteo. What you say, I will do. Yet——"

He sighed lugubriously, and his eyes strayed to the clump of cypresses which had swallowed the dancing girls.

Matteo set off along a pebbly path which threaded the garden, or series of gardens, on the floor of the valley. The Turcople followed him with heavy feet and wandering gaze. But no other houris appeared to distract their attention. They passed several of the pavilions, and sometimes a faint lilt of laughter or the echo of music reached their ears; but the dwellers in these pleasure houses remained concealed from sight.

The path ended in a dense growth of cypresses, and after a moment's search, Matteo discovered that it bore to the left and continued past the trees. Turning a corner, he found himself at the base of the granite wall that sealed the valley's entrance. In front of him yawned a semicircular opening, closed by a network of steel bars, and on either side of this stood a gigantic negro in white waist-cloth and turban, with an immensely long simitar in the hollow of his arm.

Ali took one look at their wizened faces, incongruously out of place with their powerful bodies.

"Eunuchs!" he muttered. "Careful, lord! These cattle are not to be toyed with."

Matteo strode up to the nearest of the guards.

"I would fain go up to Massiaf," he said.

The man exposed his white teeth in a grin, but made no other answer.

"Open for me!" bade Matteo. "Do you understand?"

The man opened his mouth, and stooped to permit Matteo to see the stump that had been left of his tongue.

"Naught but houris and eunuch mutes!" remarked Ali with satisfaction. "This valley is better than many castles I have known. You had best reflect again, Messer Matteo."

"Be still," commanded Matteo impatiently.

He tapped the guard on the arm, and pointed to the gateway.

"Open!" he repeated.

The eunuch's reply was to thumb the blade of his simitar, and emit a shrill whistle. Feet pattered behind the bars, and dimly Matteo descried a dozen or more fellows to the two on his side of the grill, whose teeth and simitars glittered in the shadows. The man Matteo had touched grinned and shook his head.

"Had we our swords I would assail the dogs!" declared Matteo furiously. "But 'tis of no avail, Ali. We shall gain naught by this parade of our helplessness."

"So I believed from the beginning, Messer Matteo," agreed the old Turcople cheerfully. "We were much better off with the houris that Allah or somebody sent us by mistake, mayhap."

"Never by mistake! Be sure of that. And let me not catch you yielding to their amorous persuasions, or when I regain my freedom I will cast you from my service!"

"No need of hard words, lord," grumbled Ali. "When did I deny your orders since you were old enough to hold a blade? Certes, if you will be a fool, Ali Ma'akwaa will suffer with you."

The cypresses were between them and the guarded gate, and Matteo dropped his arm about the Turcople's shoulders.

"'Tis as you say," he returned. "There is no need for hard words. We will face this together, and if you will but stand by me, we shall yet have Sinan at a loss."

"Oh, I'll stand by you," promised Ali. "Never doubt. Ha, here are the houris again!"

Matteo smiled at the comical note of infatuation which instantly showed in his follower's voice.

"Remember!" he warned. "On guard! The damsels are our enemies. They would conquer our souls, so that Sinan may enslave our wills."

The houris danced around them, with a flaunting of delicate charms and a deluge of bantering remarks.

"Certes, now you know you may not flee from our ugliness, you will no longer leave us to pine alone!" cried their leader.

"We are resolved, since we must, lady, to get on as best we can," replied Matteo.

"You have but to order, lord," she answered readily. "Shall we dance once more for you? Shall we sing to you? Or shall we wander through the Garden?"

"Not so," returned Matteo warily. "It hath reached your ears, I believe, that I am a singer of songs and a teller of tales?"

"Aye, lord."

"Then my suggestion is that we repair to the pavilion in which you found us, and make an exchange of the songs and romaunts we know."

The damsels all clapped their hands delightedly.

"A fair proposal!" they applauded. "Come, let us dance thither!"

And the merry crew skipped along over the short, springy grass, singing as they went a Persian love song that was gemmed with classical naughtiness.

In the pavilion a bountiful assortment of baked fowls and meats, tender salads, sweets and fruits and half a dozen different wines awaited them. The damsels insisted first upon serving Matteo and Ali. Afterward all sat on the cushions ranged around the low table, and when the edge of hunger had been dulled and the wine-cups had been filled, the leader of the houris requested Matteo to render them a song after the manner of the Franks. Then she sang in reply to him, and one of her company told a tale that was spiced with wickedness and packed with laughable puns, and Matteo recited the Geste of Hwesgither, which told how a Danish knight had loved a French lady better than life or his own desires.

So passed the day until evening had become night.

"Have we met your approval, lord?" asked the queen of the houris when the applause of Matteo's effort had died away.

"Aye, indeed."

"And doth it please you to accept the love we offer you?"

"Nay, lady," quoth Matteo, "as perchance you may have perceived, my people do not look upon love as do yours. For us the end of love doth not consist in the mere attainment of its fruits. We look beyond to the satisfaction and enrichment of the soul. 'Tis what we call chivalry."

"And you may love no woman?" she asked, wide eyed.

"Nay, lady. I worship one who is far beyond me, far above me, a fair star set in the ultimate skies. To her service I am sworn from this day forth."

His questioner sighed.

"Bear witness, comrades," she appealed to her attendants, "I have striven with all my arts."

"Aye, so have you, sister," they replied.

She turned again to Matteo.

"'Tis a barren creed you own, sweet youth," she said. "I could wish you might choose ours. Life is life, and the pleasure of it is fleeting. Why stray after what may be no more than a mirage of the desert? You are there, and I can feel you—so!" She clasped his hand in hers. "That is real. But can you touch this specter of the skies?"

"She is as real to me as if I could," answered Matteo simply.

"Ha, so! You are a stout lover, of your own kind. Yet I have one boon to ask of you."

"Name it, lady."

She took a tall flask of wine which had not been opened and poured a cup. This she lifted, and kissed the rim.

"Drink, lord!" she cried. "Thus you may not forget one who was unworthy."

"Not unworthy," objected Matteo.

He drank, and she refilled the cup and passed it to Ali.

"You, too, old one," she said.

Ali drained it, nothing loath. And of a sudden, it seemed to Matteo that her face was dwindling into the background of shadows. A weight, as of all the world, bore down upon him.

"What follows?" he mumbled thickly.

He was conscious of soft arms that stole around his neck, of lips pressed to his, of the intoxicating perfume of her body.

"You bid farewell to Paradise," a voice murmured from a vasty distance.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LORD OF DEATH

"MESSER MATTEO! Messer Matteo!" Matteo aroused himself resentfully. Somebody was shaking him by the shoulders.

"Wake up, Messer Matteo! We are out of Paradise!"

Matteo sat up and looked around him. Ali had just released him. They were in the room overlooking the courtyard in

Massiaf to which they had been conducted upon their arrival.

"How came we here?" he asked stupidly.

"Nay, lord, I have been awake only long enough to come to your side."

"'Tis more of Sinan's deviltry," decided Matteo, discarding the silken robe he wore. "Finding he might not seduce us in that Garden of Delight which so attracted you, Ali, he hath removed us to earthly quarters."

"Aye, there is a flavor of hashish on my tongue," admitted Ali sheepishly. "Bethink you, Messer Matteo, was it all a dream?"

"A dream? Never! And do not let them delude you into fancying 'twas so. Come, now, let us bathe."

They found their clothes arrayed in order and their weapons and armor bright. Ali was buckling his master's sword-belt when a knock sounded at the doorway, and Kafur entered with two of the negro slaves carrying trays of food.

"Greeting, lord," he hailed Matteo. "Did you rest well?"

"We rested passing well and enjoyed diverting dreams," replied Matteo.

"That is fortunate," said Kafur imperturbably, "for Sinan desires your presence as soon as you shall have broken your fast."

"He hath taken his time in receiving us," retorted Matteo, exploring the tray before him.

"Why, you must have had sleep——"

"For a day and two nights?"

Kafur eyed the jongleur shrewdly, but made no answer. So Matteo and Ali ate their fill, and then rose to signify their readiness to wait upon the lord of Massiaf.

Their guide led them into a section of the castle which they had not traversed previously. Guards in shining mail, with simitars unsheathed, stood along the walls of passages and at every door and gateway. They climbed interminable flights of stairs, and emerged at last upon a broad terrace on the edge of a great cliff which formed one face of the mountain.

The terrace was thronged with men in white robes and turbans, and at the right side a throne was erected upon a stone platform. On this throne was huddled a small figure, shrouded in ample robes. All of it that could be seen was the head, abnormally large, with skin stretched tight over prominent bones, long, woolly, white hair and beard, thin hawklike nose and eyes that burned with lambent flames.

Not a word was said. Kafur walked to the foot of the throne, knelt and thrice bowed his forehead to the pavement. Matteo and Ali stood behind him, restless under the piercing eyes.

"Rise, slave!" croaked the owner of the eyes, with an impatient gesture of clawlike fingers. "Is this the Frank I bade you fetch?"

"Aye, lord."

The eyes concentrated upon Matteo.

"Do you know me?" rasped the voice.

"I think you are he who is called Sinan," returned Matteo coolly. "The Lord of the Assassins."

"Also called the Old Man of the Mountain," chuckled the voice shrilly. "Also called the Lord of Death."

"It may be, lord," agreed Matteo. "You sent for me. What would you have?"

The eyes on the throne glared into his.

"Wot you of my power, Frank?" asked the voice.

"I know that you are feared."

Again the harsh, grating chuckle, inhuman in its heartless glee.

"Here, slave!" the voice that followed it abruptly was vibrant with authority.

A finger beckoned one of the white-clad figures from the front rank about the throne. The man stepped forward, a stalwart, handsome fellow.

"The cliff-edge—jump!" ordered the voice.

The man salaamed once. His face never twitched. He walked to the cliff-edge, and stepped off into space. Not a sound emphasized the act. Not a voice was raised in applause or denunciation. Sinan watched the obedience of his order with a ferocious kind of interest; then fastened his attention again upon Matteo, who could not repress a shudder.

"Have your Frankish rulers such servants?" demanded the voice.

"No, lord. They value their servants' lives too much."

"Lives! What are lives? Here! You!"

The terrible old man on the throne beckoned at random to a retainer near-by, and the man designated advanced without a tremor.

"Cut off your head!" bade the voice.

The man salaamed, whipped his simitar from its sheath, placed the keen edge to his throat, shoved with desperate energy—and his head flew from the neck and rolled, trickling blood, to the steps of the throne, while the body, spouting like a fountain, collapsed slowly to the ground.

"Hee, hee, hee!" giggled the voice on the throne. "That man's father died for me, and his grandfather slew himself in the same way for my father. Have you Franks families of servants like them?"

"Nay, lord," answered Matteo, "and I pray you, give me no more demonstrations of your power. Once was enough. 'Tis against my religion for men to slay themselves without cause."

"Religion? What is religion? And as for cause—did not their lord command them?"

"It may be," returned Matteo steadily. "But I take no joy in slaughter. Now, what is your will with me?"

Sinan regarded him for several moments with blazing eyes.

"You realize my power?" he questioned.

"Aye, lord."

"If I ordered your death, naught could save you."

"Yet I do not fear you."

"Ha, so! You are a brave youth. I have watched you long. Did you know that?"

"Nay, lord."

Sinan chuckled to himself.

"Three years I have watched you, since you made use of that ring you still wear upon Messer Gambaglio in Tripoli. Aye, Messer Matteo, I have watched your progress with interest."

"You flatter me, lord."

"Not so. I would use you."

"It may be we shall not agree," said Matteo.

Behind him Ali whispered tremblingly:

"Speak him fair, Messer Matteo! For —— sake, speak him fair!"

Sinan chuckled with fiendish glee.

"Not agree! Tee, hee, hee! 'Tis a brave youth! Life is not promising for those who do not agree with the Lord of Death."

"As you please," retorted Matteo. "Remember, the temptations of Paradise did not tempt."

The miniature figure on the marble throne writhed itself into a knot on the cushions.

"Paradise!" it snarled. "What talk is this? Those who despise Paradise have left to them only Eblis!"

Now, Matteo had not forgotten the inexpressible sneer with which Sinan had dismissed his mention of religion. He aimed a shot at random.

"For the ignorant 'tis well enough to talk of Paradise and Eblis, lord. But we know how to balance life and the future and what is hidden behind the veil."

The wrathful figure uncoiled itself with a kind of malign interest such as it had exhibited once before.

"'Tis a rare youth," observed the spiteful voice. "Kafur, the brethren will retire. I will talk with Messer Matteo alone."

The host of white-garbed men salaamed deeply, and backed off through the one wide gateway which gave on the terrace. Kafur was last of all, his inscrutable face revealing nothing of his thoughts.

Sinan waited the dispersal of his followers with ill-concealed impatience.

"Come closer, youth," he said eagerly when all were out of earshot. "Nay, not you, old monkey," this last was ejaculated at Ali who would have followed his master. "You have a keen wit. You should know better than to cast doubt upon the benefits of Paradise before my people. Mayhap, you would not poison any of them, but one can never be sure."

Matteo smiled.

"You knew you had not deluded me, did you not, lord?"

"Aye, but men have gone in and doubted, and when they came forth they cried like babes to be sent back." The hellish chuckle burst out again with cynical mirth. "Such are glad to slay themselves at a nod, for by death at the wish of their lord they believe that they shall win the right of entry into Paradise, never to depart."

Matteo experienced a shock of revulsion.

"So that is how you school your followers to such explicit obedience!" he exclaimed.

"The credit is not mine," returned Sinan complacently. "I am the third lord of the order in Syria, but long years ago it was established at Alamut in the Caucasus by Hassan, the Persian, who was first to perceive the surest way to attach men's loyalty."

"And none hath denounced the imposture?"

"Of what avail for any to do so? I have but to send the doubter to the Garden of Delight. No Moslem can withstand the lure."

"A Christian can," said Matteo proudly.

"So it seems," agreed Sinan. "For a day," he added, giggling.

"For as long as it pleases him,"rejoined Matteo. "Think not, lord, because you have the power of life and death that you can bend me to your will. At worst, you can slay me."

"Why, that is true," approved Sinan. "I had it in mind to try you out. For I would bind you to me, if I could." The shrill voice took on a note of earnestness Matteo had not noted before. "Aye, could I have won you to me by the Garden of Delight, I had held you, youth, in chains more rigid than any Christian dungeon boasts. But you withstood me—how I know not. Say, was it art-magic? Religion means naught to me. All religion is wordy nothingness. But betimes I think there is a germ of truth in the black art. What was your spell?"

"Love," answered Matteo, smiling.

"Love? The principle of likeness!" The carrion head on the throne wagged knowingly. "I have heard the necromancers advance the theory. We will argue it some other time. The morning speeds, Messer Matteo, and we have a bargain to drive."

"I have heard naught of a bargain," said Matteo.

"You hear it now. In brief, I wish you to slay certain persons for me."

Matteo drew himself up haughtily.

"My sword is not for sale."

"Tee, hee, hee! You speak like some Frankish baron with castles and feudal rights, instead of a homeless bastard, who would be without any riches, save what his voice could bring him, but for a certain ring."

Matteo stripped the ring from his finger.

"Take it," he said. "'Twas given me in payment of a debt. We will count the payment settled."

Sinan waved it away.

"You are over-hasty. Keep the ring. You may yet have need of it. But why should you spurn my offer?"

"I have heard no offer."

"I offered you death."

"Death for whom?"

"Those whom you hate."

The blood lashed through Matteo's veins. He leaned forward until his face was very close to the evil, wrinkled visage of the Lord of Death.

"What do you know of those I hate?" he hissed.

Sinan snickered with mocking hilarity.

"I know everything, good youth. 'Tis a source of my power. I have watched you for three years. You hate three men, Achmet-ibn-Muros, prince of Emesa; El-Afdel, one of his emirs; and Messer Renier de Chappes, lord of Nerak and Mardan."

"My vengeance, yes, that is a price I will accept," said Matteo. "Which ——"

"The two Saracens," interrupted Sinan eagerly. "The time is ripe, and I have made a plan that can not fail! Oh, long years have I waited for such a chance! My punishment is slow, but it is certain, and how all the mighty lords, Christian and Moslem, will shudder when they see me strike down Achmet-ibn-Muros in his palace!"

Curiosity suddenly attacked Matteo. Then he remembered something his mother had said that last night at Nerak, after he had come home, flushed with his day of adventure, the ring of Sinan on his finger. "Many a prince of my house has died under the knives of the Old Man of the Mountain!"

Yet he pressed the question.

"Why do you hate Achmet-ibn-Muros?"

"Because he and his allies have waged bitter war upon me, and cut off the tribute I used to exact from all the princes of that country! A score of times my people have endeavored to slay him, and always he hath sent me their heads pickled in brine. But now he can not escape. This plan that I have been framing for nigh three years leaves no path for his flight."

Matteo studied the sinister figure with growing respect. At times he suspected Sinan of insanity. Again, it seemed that the warped, twisted, little body must contain a genius, perverted, yet real.

"What is your plan, lord?" he asked.

"This. You are a jongleur of merit. Oh, do not start! I have followed your career with the interest of a father, for when Gambaglio reported to me of your visit and the circumstances of your life, I saw that you might some day be fitted to play a part in my plots. Aye, you are a famous jongleur, and they say, too, that you are as apt in Saracen tales and songs as any story-teller of Damascus."

"I know somewhat of such matters," replied Matteo, as Sinan waited for him to speak.

"Ha, 'tis excellent! Mark you, now. Achmet-ibn-Muros hath a grandson, Feizul-ibn-Khalid. The lad's father is dead. He is the apple of his grandfather's eye. Next week Feizul is to be married to the daughter of the Emir El-Afdel. Tee, hee, hee! That touches you! Do you remember how he and Achmet chopped off the heads of your father and mother? Oh, yes, I know that, too."

Matteo's throat was dry and parched. His eyes were blurred. He leaned forward, and clutched Sinan by the arm.

"Man," he said harshly, "if you trifle with me about this I will kill you there where you sit—aye, even though your people hurl me over the cliff in the next breath!"

The Lord of Death met his eye without flinching.

"You are a bold youth!" chuckled the knife-edged voice, with its hint of spiteful humor. "No man hath ever laid a finger before this on the person of the Sheikh-al-Jebal—and lived."

Matteo shook him slightly, unheeding his words.

"The plan!" he demanded. "The plan!"

"A simple matter—but would you object to unhanding me? I am somewhat ancient, and not very hardy. I thank you, good youth. You are rough—which augers ill for your enemies. Oh, yes, the plan. There will be high feasting in Emesa throughout the next two weeks. Princes and sultans, emirs and sheikhs, from all over the land are coming. You will attend with a company of musicians, dancers and acrobats, with whom your rôle will be that of a story-teller. You and your companions will be given prompt entrance to the palace at such a time. The rest is for you to compass."

"And my company? Are they——"

"They are such as you saw execute my orders this morning."

"But can they pass for what they pretend to be?"

"Damascus doth not hold more skilful performers. Nay, Messer Matteo, I am well served. My spies are everywhere. My servants are of all ranks. You shall not be embarrassed by stupid helpers."

Matteo's hand went to his sword-hilt.

"I am your man, lord, for this venture. When do we start?"

Sinan clapped his hands.

"Tee, hee, hee! 'Tis a desperate youth! But such I need! Such I need! The sooner the better. You are the right captain for the enterprise."

Four enormous blacks entered at a trot, carrying a small open litter. Sinan tottered down from his throne, and sat himself in it.

"Come with me, Messer Matteo, and you shall meet your assistants. Good men all with a bow-string, knife or pillow. Tee, hee, hee!"

CHAPTER XVII

HOW MATTEO TASTED VENGEANCE

IT WAS evening in the Court of Pomegranates, Achmet-ibn-Muros and his emirs sat on carpets spread over the steps that led up to the Hall of a Thousand Joys, which was too cramped to receive all the great ones who had flocked to Emesa for the marriage feast of Feizul-ibn-Khalid and Azra, the daughter of El-Afdel. Overhead the women of the palace cooed behind the gratings of the harem windows. A motley throng of retainers, servants, privileged merchants of the city, slaves and entertainers lined the open space.

The girls of a Bedouin dancing troupe had whirled through the last mazes of their palpitating dance, and scrambled like crows for the largesse flung by Achmet and his guests. Now, the majordomo stepped forward.

"What is your pleasure, prince?" he asked. "We have a juggler with a pig-tail from Cathay or——"

"Nay, we have had enough of the tricksters," interrupted Achmet-ibn-Muros. "Let us hear again the young story-teller who told the tale of Sinbad and the Seven Voyages."

"You mean El-Dimiryat of Damascus, lord?"

"If that be his name."

The majordomo clapped his hands, and a young man clad in raiment of yellow and green and carrying a tabor thrust himself to the front of the bystanders. After him appeared a dozen or more stout fellows, similarly dressed, who made a profound salaam to the prince.

"I am he for whom you asked, lord," said the leader. "Command me, and I will obey. Shall my comrades perform tricks of tumbling and strength? Shall they dance the sword-dance? Would you have them exhibit white-magic? Or shall they sing medleys and glees?"

"Not so," returned the prince, stroking his long white beard. "It is my will that you relate us another such tale of mystery and courage as charmed my guests last evening."

"It shall be even as you order, mighty prince," replied the young man, as his followers arranged themselves in a semicircle behind him. "If it please you, I shall now proceed to narrate for your diversion 'The Tale of Ali Baba the Woodcutter of Ispahan and the Forty Thieves.'

"In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise to Him, the Creator of Man, the Lord of Lords, the Cause of Causes, the one true God! To Him the glory and the merit! And so my tale:

"In a town in Persia, there lived two brothers, one named Cassim, the other Ali Baba. Their father left them scarcely anything; but——"

Utter silence possessed the court as the golden voice exerted its spell. Prince and emir, merchant and soldier, servant and slave, men and women, all within range of it succumbed to its charm. At intervals the narrator burst into song, accompanying himself on the tabor. Again, his background of assistants chanted a metrical passage, their sonorous tones throwing out in high relief the rich, vibrant tenor which mastered all of them.

On drove the tale, with its fantastic elements of crime and adventure, love and cunning, ambition and despair, which have made it a world classic. At that time, even in the country of its origin, it was not so well known as it is today. Achmet-ibn-Muros owned to excitement by the frequency with which his lean, muscular fingers combed the thick hair of his beard.

Beside him, the tall, hook-nosed man, whom the minstrels and entertainers knew as the Emir El-Afdel, father of the bride whose nuptials they were assisting to celebrate, stirred uneasily in his seat.

When the lids of the jars were lifted, and the thieves revealed inside, a chorus of tiny shrieks came from the women's windows overhead, and the prince and his guests laughed with grim amusement. Men of blood and death, themselves, they delighted in tales of blood and death and relished a jest all the more because it was savored with cruelty.

"By the Prophet, 'tis a pleasing tale!" exclaimed the prince, when the young man salaamed in token of its finish. "How say you?" he addressed the Emir El-Afdel.

"The blood chills in my veins at the ingenuity of the device," returned El-Afdel. "Why could not any enemy dispose of one he hated by some such plan?"

"True," assented the prince. "Teller of tales, you have won our favor. Tarry a while in Emesa, and when at last you leave us your purse shall be full of gold."

"You honor your servant beyond his deserts, great prince," said the young man humbly. "Is it permitted to offer further entertainment?"

"Nay, for the stars say that midnight approaches. Tomorrow evening you shall entertain us again. Now, we must hope that the skill of your art may not affright us with dreams of peril."

The young story-teller salaamed, but made no audible answer. He and his company withdrew to one side of the courtyard, and spread their pallets under the shade of the colonnade. They were joined here by one who came from the farther end of the Court of Pomegranates, a quiet, shadow-like figure, low-voiced, unassuming.

"Ha, Kafur!" breathed the young leader. "You are late! The graybeard hath fears his sleep may be disturbed by dreams arising from the crimes I recounted to him!"

The quiet man smiled with deadly mockery.

"Aye, lord, he will be disturbed, dreaming or waking. All is ready!"

"The horses are in the grove beyond the mosque?"

"Aye, and the brethren are assigned to their duties. Four have been placed in charge of the slaying of the outer guards."

"Whom slay we first?"

The story-teller's hand leaped instinctively to his waist-sash as he spoke. Kafur considered momentarily.

"It had best be El-Afdel," he decided. "The guest-rooms will not be so closely guarded."

"I would it were the other," objected the story-teller. "I fear Achmet——"

Kafur laid a reassuring hand on his wrist.

"Nay, lord, we cannot fail—thanks to your achievements. Are we not lodging here, in the heart of the palace, at the very doors of our enemies? Who can stop us? A brace or two of sleepy guards to be strangled, and the ways will be open."

"I hope so," said the other fiercely. "St. Matthew, my namesake! When I think the graybeard may call himself my grandfather, I would open my veins and let out the blood he hath tainted!"

"Peace!" whispered Kafur. "We must feign sleep."

They lay down in the midst of the group, and presently all was still in the court. The servants and slaves had dispersed to the kitchens. Soldiers repaired to the guard-rooms or their posts. The fountain in the center of the court splashed lazily. The night breeze stole through the pomegranates with a drowsy swish. The palace dreamed.

Hours passed, but not one of the men in the group under the colonnade was asleep. Fierce eyes gleamed beneath their mantles; knives flashed ready in voluminous sleeves. They lay in close-piled inertness like watching wolves. Suddenly Kafur emitted a gentle hiss. They started to their feet as a lone figure crept from a door behind the flight of stairs leading up to the Hall of Joys. The knife he held in one hand dripped redly on the paving.

" 'Tis done!" he breathed as he reached them. "Follow, brothers!"

Kafur and the story-tellers sped behind him on noiseless feet; the rest trailed them close. They entered the door and stumbled over a sentry, stabbed and prone. The body was shoved to one side, and a member of the band donned helmet and surcoat and took the vacant post. Where the corridor turned a second sentry lay, and his murderer crouched beside him.

"El-Afdel's door is just beyond," whispered the Assassin.

The hangings swayed in the draft as the invaders reached the doorway. Three entered; the rest clustered in readiness to meet whatever emergency might arise.

"There he lies!" muttered the first of the three, pointing to a divan in the middle of the chamber. El-Afdel was sprawled across it, arms spread wide, his beaked face upturned.

"Shall I slay him?" asked Kafur.

"Nay," objected the story-teller, with a cruel smile. "Ali, do you take heed that he cannot scream out. Then we will awaken him. He must know how he passes."

"There is no time to spare!" urged Kafur.

"There is always time for vengeance," rejoined the story-teller.

They surrounded the divan. Ali placed his dagger to the sleeper's throat and pinched his ear. El-Afdel opened his eyes—and would have sat up, but the naked steel pressed him down. He stared at the faces bent over him, and his eyes strained in their sockets. His face twitched with fear. A rattling noise came from his throat.

"Do you know me?" demanded the story-teller.

"Yes," panted El-Afdel. "You are the story-teller El-Dimiryat."

"No," snarled the story-teller, "that is not really who I am. I am one whose mother you said you loved—yet you slew her, and my father, too."

"The spawn of the Frank! And her!"

"Aye! Do you remember how you stormed Nerak? Do you remember how my father fought you in the hall? And how you feared to meet him alone? And how you hacked off his head—and hers?"

The questions fell like sword-blows, and under their impact the keen face of the man on the divan settled into rigid lines of composure.

"I remember."

His lips barely framed the words.

"Good! Remember, now—your last thought in life—that the son of Gui de Nerak and Horazahde brought you to death!"

El-Afdel's face twisted into a grin of derision. He filled his chest, and his mouth opened to roar a bellow that ended abruptly in a bubbling grunt. Ali wiped his knife on the divan.

"There was nought else for it, Messer Matteo," he said. "He would have called the alarm. He knew you would kill him, and desired the satisfaction of making sure your death in return."

Matteo looked down at the shambles of the divan with unwilling awe.

"Is he really dead?" he asked.

"No doubt of it," broke in Kafur. "Come, we have another deed to do, of more import than this."

"But first," said Matteo, "do you take off his head, Ali. We will put it with Achmet's on the gates of the palace, even as they hung two poor skulls before the ruins of Nerak."

Ali accomplished his task with neat dispatch, and holding his bloody prize by the hair, followed the leaders back into the corridor. The other Assassins were already slinking through the passage in the direction whence they had come. They emerged again into the court, passed under the shallow ramp of the stairs, and entered a second door which led to the prince's rooms.

Here, too, the knives of the slayers had been busy. Two guards lay dead in the shadows and members of the band had taken their places.

"Have we far to go?" asked Matteo of Kafur. "Do you know exactly where he lies?"

"Aye, lord. My time hath not been wasted the while you have been charming him into blindness. He lies in the same chamber with his beloved grandson. He cannot let the lad out of his sight, and with the marriage to be consummated tomorrow—or so they think—" a ghastly chuckle evidenced Kafur's sense of humor—"he hath kept him by his side for the night."

"Ha, by Saint Matthew, that is a fair act of grace!" exclaimed the story-teller. " 'Twill be so much simpler."

"And the bride?" spoke up Ali. "Where is she?"

"In the women's quarters," answered Kafur.

"Are they to be sacred to us?" demanded Ali.

"Nay, but——"

"Let be," ordered Matteo impatiently. "Is not the blood of the men of our enemies enough for you, old wolf?"

"Did they not slay your mother, the lady Horazahde?" countered Ali stubbornly.

"Mayhap, but we are not Saracens, Ali. Nay, I will not argue the case. I do not slay sleeping women, even though I may never wear knightly spurs."

Kafur listened to this debate with cynical indifference.

"Have it your own way, Messer Matteo," he said. " 'Twould be impossible to kill the girl without having an uproar. Women will never listen to reason, and they fear death too hardly to be quiet. Yet if you say so, we——"

"I have said what I have said," declared Matteo hastily. "We will slay no women."

Kafur shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, then. We will finish our task. Are you ready?"

The band gathered at his heels, with knives bared, and he guided them along the deserted corridor, whose open doorways gave back no echoing hails to the muffled footfalls.

"Is it safe?" breathed Matteo. "Should we pass by here without securing——"

"Oh, they are all dead, lord," Kafur reassured him. "My people saw to that at once. We could not leave any alive on this corridor. 'Tis not like the guest-rooms opposite where each man hath no concern for his neighbor's affairs."

Matteo shuddered. He hungered for revenge, but this bland, wholesale slaughter in the dark, this stabbing of sleeping men who died without realizing how death had smote them, was more than he could stomach.

A wide archway rose before them. In the obscure light that fell from a hanging lamp Matteo discerned two huddled shapes upon the floor, with waist-cloths knotted around their throats. Beside them stood two of the Assassins.

"You have heard naught?" questioned Kafur as the invaders approached.

"There has not been the scurry of a mouse," answered one of the guardians of the portal.

"A truce to caution!" snarled Matteo, tearing the hangings aside. "We have our prey. Why hesitate?"

The pack swarmed after him, knives clutched in their right hands, waist-cloths or unrolled turbans hung on their left arms, ready for strangling or tripping an opponent.

The chamber they entered was a large one. A shaded lamp cast subdued light, and the starshine flooded the windows. Here, as in El-Afdel's chamber, a broad divan occupied the center. But on it lay two figures, instead of one. Matteo sped across the intervening space, and stared down at the white-bearded head of the man who was his grandfather. To the other sleeper he gave no heed. He thought only of Achmet-ibn-Muros, and the fever of hate burned fiercer in his heart.

He lifted his knife to strike, and the prince of Emesa awoke with a startled grunt. Ali was swift to compel silence, his knife-blade falling lightly on the scraggly throat. There was no sign of fear in the old warrior's face. His luminous eyes flashed with a hint of defiance.

"So this is your real trade, El-Dimiryat!" he said.

"I am not El-Dimiryat," returned Matteo.

"Tool of Sinan, then."

"Nor am I the tool of Sinan, although I am his ally. I slay you for my own satisfaction."

Achmet-ibn-Muros furrowed his wrinkled brows in thought.

"I do not recall your face," he answered. "How have I wronged you?"

Matteo leaned closer.

"You wronged me, grandfather, when you murdered my father and my mother." The haughty, deep-lined face twinged momentarily.

"So they had a son!" murmured the prince, and involuntarily he glanced at the sleeping youth beside him, whose slumbers had not been disturbed by the pattering feet of the Assassins or the low-toned dialog.

"They had a son to avenge them," confirmed Matteo.

The luminous eyes blazed with a light of appraisal.

"A son of proper spirit!" approved Achmet-ibn-Muros. "You have the blood of your race."

"I would I might cleanse it from my veins!" retorted Matteo.

"Let me have that knife, grandson, and I will do it for you," suggested the old man with a bitter smile.

"Nay, you shall see a grandson die," promised Matteo.

He snatched the covers from the sleeping form next the prince.

"You would not harm him!" exclaimed Achmet-ibn-Muros, straining against the knife that pressed upon his neck.

"You shall see him die, before your own head comes off," exulted Matteo savagely.

"Nay! In Allah's name, spare him! He is the last of my seed! Spare him, whoever you are! See, I will suffer instead!"

"You will suffer as well! I will wipe you out, root and branch!"

Matteo grasped the shoulder of Feizul-ibn-Khalid and roughly turned him over on his back, face upward. The youth's eyes blinked open, and he sat up with a yawn.

"What—who——"

But his amazement was not greater than Matteo's. For the face before Matteo was the face of Horazahde, the face of his mother.

"Dear Lord!" gasped Matteo. "What is this?"

He covered his own eyes, and sank down upon the couch. How could he slay this boy, younger than himself, this boy, who, whatever his name, had the face of his mother, the great, dark eyes, the contours, the delicate eyebrows and ears?

"I can not! I can not!" he groaned aloud.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GIFT OF FEIZUL-IBN-KHALID

"HE IS no more than a girl-faced boy!" grunted Ali in disgust.

"Have you looked closely at him?" returned Matteo, uncovering his own eyes.

"Nay, but—Ha, 'tis—Oh, Holy Mary! Oh, Blessed Lord!"

Ali staggered back as though he, too, had seen a ghost.

"If I was not sure, I would think she—" he muttered brokenly. "Nay, but El-Afdel smote off her head!"

"You babble like a child, old wolf," said Matteo scornfully. " 'Tis the bridegroom, but his blood is my blood, the blood of her who——"

The young Feizul, who had stared from one to the other of them in bewilderment, appealed for enlightenment.

"Who are these people, grandfather? How came they here?"

"The youth is your cousin. I know not his name."

"I am Matteo d'Antioch," interposed Matteo.

"I wronged him once," continued Achmet-ibn-Muros placidly. "His followers are Assassins. They are considering our deaths."

Feizul stretched himself out again on the divan.

"So it be with you, grandfather, I care not," he said. "Strike when you will, cousin. Allah sends death in the right hour, and if it comes now, why should we mourn?"

Despite himself, Matteo was compelled to admit a reluctant admiration for the boy's spirit, but he turned upon Achmet-ibn-Muros with redoubled ferocity.

"You have lived a long life," he rasped. "Do you know how close you are to death?"

"Aye, grandson," replied the prince with some amusement. "I have lived long enough to know death passing well—and, too, the hearts of men."

" 'Tis no matter for levity! A moment since I hungered to bathe my hands in your blood. Now—I know not! This lad's face hath unnerved me."

"He is like her," admitted the prince. "That is one reason why I have loved him."

"Yet you did not love her enough to——"

"I loved her enough to slay her for her own sake," retorted Achmet with a hint of fierceness.

"Nay, how could you?" protested Matteo.

"She had left her people. She had scorned me, her father. She had put to shame her intended husband. She had——"

"She had done no more than consult her own happiness. But 'tis of no avail to discuss that now. You murdered her. You murdered my father. Your accomplice hath paid his debt—where is El-Afdel's head, Ali? Ha, see you this? 'Tis in my power to garner yours to place beside it."

"I doubt it not, grandson," returned the old man composedly. "I see plainly you are a warrior of prowess. I have never been bearded before in my own palace. But you are also a Frank and a Christian, and I think it begins to irk you to slay men in their beds."

"Why should it?" snapped Matteo. "Did you feel restraint when you——"

Feizul reared himself upon one elbow impatiently.

"Slay if you would, cousin," he said. "There is over-much of talk."

A red mist swirled in front of Matteo's eyes. He leaped forward, dagger raised to strike— But the face of Horazahde shone white and clear against the sanguine background. His hand fell nerveless to his side.

"I can not! I can not!" he groaned.

Then, desperately, he recovered self-control.

"Look you, you who call me grandson," he said. "And you, too, beardless one. I am come tonight on my own mission of vengeance. That I dismiss for that I am too weak for the task or else a higher will than mine doth constrict my hate. But in some sort I am obligated to Sinan. Whatever may be my personal feelings, I cannot wholly set aside his aims. In any case, I must render myself to him for judgment if I permit you to escape."

"Not so, grandson," interrupted Achmet-ibn-Muros eagerly. "Stay here at Emesa with me. I have wronged you, 'tis true. That is an old story, and all that may be said about it will not make it right. Yet stay with me, and I will do all I may to repay the debt I owe—a double debt, I know."

Matteo shook his head.

"It cannot be. You are a Saracen; I am a Christian. You are too late, grandfather. The harm is done. You should have remembered in time."

"I will do what I can to right the wrong," the prince replied with simply dignity.

"Mayhap, but 'tis more than you or any other man can do. Now, heed me. Will you take pledge by Allah and all you hold dear to give over persecution of Sinan's people and property and to render him aid at need?"

"I will do so."

Matteo turned.

"Kafur!"

The chief of the Assassins stepped to his side.

"Give heed to the oath the prince takes."

"By Allah and the Prophet's beard and my own honor, I swear to keep peace with Sinan and to aid him at need!"

"You hear?" asked Matteo.

Kafur bowed.

"Is that all?" he replied. "Is the prince to live?"

"There is to be no more slaying. I will not be questioned. 'Tis I who will be responsible for this before Sinan."

Kafur bowed again.

"That may be, Messer Matteo. But there is a certain form to be followed."

He clapped his hands softly, and the dour crew of Assassins gathered around him.

"Brothers," he said, "you had an order?"

"We had," they answered as one.

"Was it not to return until you had slain?"

"It was."

"There is to be no slaying, brothers. But you are to remember the order."

Matteo stepped forward.

"I will be responsible for these men," he said hastily.

"Nay, lord," objected Kafur. "You may not come between them and an order."

He turned to his followers.

"Kneel, brothers."

They knelt before him with knives drawn.

"The way is open, brothers," he said gently.

The knives flashed in unison. The points plunged into every breast. They fell forward in a single line.

The eyes of Achmet-ibn-Muros kindled with appreciation.

"Allah give me such men!" he cried.

"Such men will win entry here a second time at need," warned Matteo, repressing a shudder of horror at the ruthlessness of the deed. "And now, Kafur, why do you not slay yourself? You have forced these men to die."

"The time is not yet," returned Kafur composedly. "I must make report to Sinan. If he pleases, doubt not I shall die."

"The man is right," spoke up the prince. "A captain should always make his report."

"He will," agreed Matteo grimly. "And he and I are like to pay dearly for it. But it grows toward dawn, and we must depart. I might bind you, but I leave it to your honor to raise no hue and cry."

Ali withdrew the knife he had been holding conveniently close to the old man's throat, and Achmet-ibn-Muros rose with the spring of youth.

"Go with Allah's favor, if you will not stay!" he said. "Yet you shall be always in my thoughts, grandson. I have learned much this night, as perchance, have you. That blood you condemned so bitterly playeth strange tricks with a man's heart, and hatred runs easily into love."

"It may be," answered Matteo wearily, "but between us stretches a sea of that same blood you spilled."

"Not between you and me, cousin," said Feizul-ibn-Khalid, extending his hand. "You are a great warrior, and I am only a boy. But I am guiltless of what hath passed. Will you accept my gratitude?"

"You do not share the blame, any more than should I," acknowledged Matteo. "Farewell, cousin."

The strange pair, the old, white-bearded man and the smooth-faced youth, stood by the divan and the long row of dead Assassins and watched the three survivors depart. Matteo looked back once from the doorway. There was a mute appeal in the eyes of Achmet-ibn-Muros, but he steeled his heart and passed out into the passage that the slayers had swept clean of life.

In the Court of Pomegranates Matteo missed Kafur. The Assassin did not reappear until they were half-way to the grove behind the mosque in which the horses were tethered.

"Where have you been?" asked Matteo sternly.

"There were a few others of my people," answered Kafur. "They had business to transact—concerning a certain order."

"Perchance even Sinan's thirst for blood may be appeased," commented Matteo sarcastically, as he mounted his horse. "Well, Ali?"

The old Turcople extended the gory head of El-Afdel.

"What of this, lord?"

To Ali Ma'akwaa Messer Matteo d'Antioch was not merely the famous jongleur, but the son of Messer Gui, the Lord of Nerak, and himself, by rights, a lord.

"Fasten it to your saddle," ordered his master. "'Twill be a bribe to Sinan to permit Kafur to live another month."

"A month or a year, what matters it?" returned Kafur phlegmatically.

"And at the end of all things is Paradise!" derided Matteo.

"At the end is Paradise," repeated Kafur tranquilly. "Dawn approaches, lord, and we should ride."

They turned their horses toward the far-off line of the Lebanon hills, behind which lay Massiaf; but they had not ridden far when Ali lifted his hand in a gesture for silence.

"Hark!" he exclaimed.

They listened, and faintly borne to them on the night-wind came the thud of hoofs on the earthen track.

"We are pursued," said Matteo. "I did wrong, after all, to spare them."

Kafur shook his head.

"As to doing wrong, I have naught to say, Messer Matteo, but there is only one horse behind us."

"Why, that is so," agreed Ali, "but he rides exceeding fast."

Matteo frowned.

"I desire no more traffic with Emesa. Spur on, comrades."

They increased their pace, but the rider who followed them gained without effort. The sun was just flooding the eastern sky with a belt of gold when he appeared on the near horizon, galloping swiftly, his white surcoat blown out behind him like a pair of gigantic wings.

"Let be," decided Matteo abruptly. "It ill suits our dignity to seem to flee one man. We will await him."

They halted by the track, and the lone rider galloped toward them, his horse maintaining tremendous speed without visible effort. The beast was bay in color, with white hoofs, and uncommonly large for the Arabian blood that showed in delicately modelled limbs and satin skin. The rider drew up abreast of Matteo, and threw back the hood of his surcoat or burnous.

He was Feizul-ibn-Khalid.

"A fair greeting, cousin," he said.

"What means this?" demanded Matteo.

"Naught, save that it ill becomes a son of princes to permit a benefactor to go unrewarded," answered Feizul simply.

"You would wipe off the debt of your life?" asked Matteo, amused.

"Nay, that I can not, but I would show appreciation, cousin."

"As how?"

Feizul swung down from his saddle, and led his horse to Matteo.

"This is El-Manzur, The Victorious," he said. "His sire was a Moorish barb from El-Andelus; his dam was the queen of the stables of Emesa. He hath never been beaten. He is fleet as the wind—as you have seen. He is tireless as a desert stallion. He is gentle to his master, terrible to his master's foes. I prize him beyond anything in my gift. Therefore I give him to you."

Matteo was touched.

"A royal gift," he approved. "None the less, cousin, 'tis not fitting that I accept. I spared you for a reason beyond my control. Although I am neither Frank nor Saracen, I ride with the Frankish hosts. I am your enemy."

"You are my kin," replied Feizul, and he pushed the bridle of El-Manzur into Matteo's hand. "I am resolved. I will not be refused."

He started to walk away over the earthen track toward the far-off minarets of Emesa, silhouetted against the sun-stained sky.

"But hold," cried Matteo, following him and leading El-Manzur. "I cannot let you go so."

El-Manzur whinnied low as though to add his own protest.

"I can walk as well as any," replied Feizul. "All I ask is that you will be kin to him."

Matteo pressed to his side.

"At the least," he said, "you must take my horse in exchange. 'Tis no fitting return for El-Manzur, but——"

"He will recall you to me whenever I ride him," exclaimed Feizul. "Aye, cousin, we will do so. But first I will make you known to El-Manzur."

He placed his hand on the bay stallion's flank.

"Ho, Splendid One," he said. "Take heed to your new master."

The bay pawed with his hoofs and shook his head and silky mane.

"He hath never felt the whip or spur," continued Feizul.

"He never shall."

"You make my heart glad. He comes at call or whistle. If you would have him increase his gait, bend to his ear and whisper your message, and no matter how fast he runs, he hath always some reserve of speed if you will but give him two secret words—*awaa lukos*. Can you remember?"

Matteo repeated them.

"Now, dismount, cousin."

Matteo obeyed, and handed to Feizul the bridle of the horse he had been riding.

"Hither, El-Manzur!" summoned Feizul, and the bay nudged between the two of them, nuzzling first one and then the other. "This is your master, the lord of your life, the provider of your food, your comrade in battle."

The bay's eyes peered into Matteo's with an almost human candor. He lifted his off-forehoof and extended it daintily. Matteo laughing, yet impressed, took it in his hand. The bay whinnied, and brushed his cheek with a velvety nose.

"He trusts you," said Feizul. "I think you will be kind to him, cousin. He is worthy of a warrior who is neither Frank nor Saracen, but greater than the greatest of either race."

"For the gift I thank you," answered Matteo. "As for the praise, I do not merit it, but let it pass."

" 'Tis honestly meant," rejoined the boy, leaping into the saddle of Matteo's mount. "Give thought some time to one who wishes you well."

"That will I, cousin, and remember your kinsman without a name."

"Nay," urged Feizul, "your name is all the better for being selfearned. But I think we shall meet again. Allah guard you!"

He patted the horse's neck, and galloped down the road in a cloud of dust. El-Manzur sent after him one whinny of farewell, then cuddled his nose on Matteo's shoulder.

"Certes," muttered Matteo to himself, "if I failed of my mission none the less have I won a prize. May the Virgin aid me to live to joy in it."

He was not happy as he thought of the interview he must have with Sinan.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW MATTEO COMPOUNDED WITH SINAN

THE terrace atop of Massiaf was deserted, save for the spidery figure of the Lord of Death. Sinan listened without comment to Matteo's account of the journey to Emesa. Shown the head of El-Afdel, he eyed it with casual curiosity and bade Ali toss it into the gulf. He dismissed Kafur with a curt nod, which the Assassin accepted with his usual absence of expression. Then Sinan focused his attention upon Matteo.

"Some men, including Frankish lords, might think you had bungled your task," he shrilled in his high, whining voice. "What have you to say?"

"Little enough," retorted Matteo. "There is no more than I have said. I could have slain Achmet-ibn-Muros, and I did not. My life is forfeit to you for those of your men, though there was no need for them to have died."

"No need? No need?" gibbered Sinan. "There was an order given. When I give an order—to a believer—it is obeyed. There is but one excuse—death."

"This time one who is not a believer failed," returned Matteo. "And he is not afraid of death."

"Doth he crave it?" asked Sinan, his head perked birdlike on one shoulder.

"Nay, I am young. I have left much of life unsampled."

Sinan cackled with glee.

"What a fool you are. You have forfeited your life, and you come here to me, the Lord of Death! Why did you not forget all about me, and go away?"

"Because my honor would not permit me to escape what I was responsible for. I promised you Achmet's death."

"Hee, hee, hee," giggled Sinan. "Mayhap, too, you knew that my arm is long. Heh! You did the wiser thing—after having first played the fool. Oh, I don't say there was no reason for sparing Achmet! I think he will keep his oath, and a live ally is better than a dead enemy. But having set your mind to a deed, you should have done it. Messer Matteo, I fear you are a fool!"

" 'Tis more than likely," assented Matteo bitterly.

"But honest, it seems," amended Sinan. "That, in itself, is a consequence of being a fool. Still, an honest man is useful. Yes, very useful. I have in mind, even now, a use I might have for you which would cancel the debt you owe me."

"No more slaying," replied Matteo. "I will not buy my release by such means."

Sinan giggled hilariously.

"Slaying? Who would think of slaying? Why should I wish to slay? Nay, you wrong me or have listened to idle tales! This is a mattter touching upon your religion."

"As how?"

"My conversion."

And Sinan wobbled upon his throne with the excess of his mirth at the amazement in Matteo's face.

"Your conversion? What mean you?"

"Nothing less than I have said. Two small words, Messer Matteo, but there is a weight of thought in them. See you—" Sinan's manner became confidential—"these Templars pester me to distraction. There is no way I can come at them, and they thrive upon their immunity, taking joy in irking me in every possible manner. But how if I become a Christian? And go about the conversion of my people? How then? What could they do?"

"They would be helpless," admitted Matteo, himself baffled by this whimsical idea.

"Aye, so I am sending you to Jerusalem to tell King Amalric that I am ripe for the Gospel, and would have him supply me priests and conclude a treaty of alliance."

"Send your own people," suggested Matteo.

"I did so once, but the Templars caught and slew them, notwithstanding they were under the king's safe-conduct."

"That is true," agreed Matteo. "I recall it. But, mark you, lord, if you accept Christianity you will have to abandon your way of rule. How could you delude your followers with the Garden of Delight if they were Christians?"

Sinan shrieked with pleasure.

"Christians? Yes, in so far as I make

them. And whatever they might be, they would always believe in the Garden of Delight. There are few men can resist that. I own I was worried when you beat me, but to make sure, I sent out some days since and caught a fat friar on the coast-road, and now he is one of the most valiant of my slayers, ready to die in a moment for the privilege of returning to the garden."

"But do you think the king and the priests would tolerate your slayers?"

"Tolerate— Are you a fool beyond measure? Why should they not tolerate a sure weapon against their enemies? There is a Kurdish prince hath won much repute in the land of Babylon,* one Salah-ed-din. Men say he will yet rule all Islam. What think you your king would say to the death of Salah-ed-din? But such matters are not for debate. Take my case to Amalric."

"Nay, lord, how can I?" objected Matteo. "With the best will in the world to obey you, yet I am attached to the service of Prince Bohemond. It is scarce likely he will permit me to leave him so soon again."

Sinan pondered on his throne, a twisted, hump-backed bundle of skin and bones and heavy robes. His lambent eyes flickered over Matteo thoughtfully.

"There is reason in what you say," he said at last. "But fear not. Bohemond will agree to your departure."

"How know you that, lord?"

Sinan cackled derisively.

"I know. And another thing, Messer Matteo. You are through with Antioch."

"Through—I do not understand you."

"Aye, through with Antioch. Would you remain always the favorite jongleur of a prince? May your gods have pity on you! That is a poor ambition."

"I am as ambitious as other men," admitted Matteo.

"As how?"

The terrible old man shot the words at him accompanied by a lowering glance of his blazing eyes.

"I would sing songs and fight and win a greater name——"

"And vengeance? Have you fulfilled your hatred? 'Tis in my mind there is another you have marked down for enmity. One you have slain, one you have pardoned—or so I gather. One remains unmet."

"De Chappes and his son," said Matteo.

"Aye, de Chappes. And he hath a son, you say? Humph! 'Tis better. There are ways to make two suffer where one can only die. Have you thought of that?"

"Aye, lord."

"Then bethink you, too, that you, in Antioch, can scarce find means to come at de Chappes in Jerusalem or Nerak. Heh?"

" 'Tis true."

"Therefore I say to you go forth from Antioch. Jerusalem awaits you. Did not the king and the young Prince Baldwin applaud you when they lately visited Bohemond? Aye, my spies overlook nothing. I said I know all, and I do know all. In Jerusalem Amalric will welcome you, and soon Prince Baldwin will have more power than now he doth. In that time, I think, you will not be among the lowest who ring the throne."

"What mean those words?" gasped Matteo.

"Hee, hee, hee," chuckled Sinan. "I know all, I said. And sometimes, it chances, I know what will befall."

A cool breeze blew across the terrace, but Matteo was conscious of the beads of sweat that formed on his forehead. It was not easy to match wits with Sinan. He mustered courage for defiance.

"Look you, lord," he began, and by effort he kept his voice level. "It seems that you design to make use of me——"

"And shall, as in the past, pay liberally," interrupted Sinan.

"That may be, but I would have you know I do not respect you or hunger for your regard or praise."

"In short," commented Sinan appreciatively, "you do not like me."

"I do not like you. Why, then, should you seek to aid me?"

"Because, good youth," came the cold answer, "you can be useful to me. Dead you are good for nothing. Living, by the operations of fate, you are potentially helpful to the plots I work upon. Deal fairly with me, and I will deal fairly with you. 'Tis all I ask."

Matteo shrugged his shoulders.

"I can say no more," he returned. "You can not charge me with deception. Now, what is this message I am to carry to the king? Remember, lord, I shall speak out my mind to him and say what I please if he asks my advice."

"Ho, ho, ho! Tee, hee, hee!" cackled

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* Egypt.

Sinan. "Big words! Tell the king what you choose, but fail not to give him the message in writing I shall cause to be delivered into your hands."

"And then I shall be quit of your service," rejoined Matteo. "It hath been to the advantage of neither of us."

Sinan burst out again into obscene mirth.

"Advantage!" he mouthed. "Be not too sure! There may be advantage, and there may not. Let the years prove it. You have your ring. I know you are honest—and a fool. Tee, hee, hee!"

He clapped his hands, and as before, the black mutes came trotting from the gateway with his litter.

"The Garden of Delight is always open to you, Messer Matteo," he quavered as he shambled into his seat. "Heh! Scorn it not! Tee, hee, hee!"

"I could slay him before they might reach me," whispered Ali eagerly to his master.

"And we should be cast into the gulf to join the other carrion at its bottom. No, he is a friend, if evil, and we shall need friends, if we fare to Jerusalem."

"Why, that is true, lord," assented Ali, who had been silent over-long for him. "Welladay, I shall be nothing loath to continue adventuring. Who knows what prizes may come our way? Jerusalem is a rich city, and many foreign men-at-arms and pilgrims to be plucked in the wine-shops, and a bicker every week or so on the marches with emirs to be unhorsed and ransomed. Aye, for all the ugly look of him, the Old One read us an apt lesson."

Matteo made no answer. He was suddenly conscious that his thoughts of Jerusalem were concerned with one person—and that one neither king nor enemy. A fair face beneath a coronet of red-gold hair. In one moment the lissom figure was hidden in a yellow gown. In the next it stood revealed in boyish leathern breeches. It required an effort of will for him to bring up the scowling features of Renier de Chappes and his son, and he must flog his hatred against them.

Kafur reigned in his horse at the fork where the road from the Orontes valley joined the great coast road from Jebleh to Antioch.

"So far only do I ride with you, Messer Matteo," he said. "But before I go I must place this packet in your charge. The Old One bade me say 'twas the message he discussed with you."

Matteo accepted the bundle of parchment wrapped in silk and sealed with black wax and the sign of the fist and triple-bladed dagger.

"And you?" he asked. "Are you suffered to live on?"

Kafur smiled mysteriously.

"When my time comes, I shall go; but why look forward to death?"

"You are a puissant man-at-arms," spoke up Ali roughly. "My master would give you service, if you wished it."

"That would I," assented Matteo.

"The faithful dog serves one master," returned Kafur. "Nay, my allegiance is pledged. But I am your friend, Messer Matteo, and prithee, bear me in your mind."

"I will, Kafur, and so, farewell."

El-Manzur was chafing at the bit, and Kafur turned off the road to give the bay room.

"Nay, not farewell, lord," admonished the Assassin. "It may be we shall meet again."

"I trow not," retorted Matteo. "I have made an end of traffic with your Old One."

Kafur's answer was a smile. He spurred his horse into a faint track which led across country and soon disappeared in a copse beside the river.

Two hours later Matteo and Ali entered the river gate of Antioch. Prince Bohemond, himself, was dismounting in the palace courtyard when they rode in, and he and John the Englishman gave them a hearty welcome.

"The tilting was vile this afternoon," growled the prince. "St. Remi aid me, but I craved diversion. Come you to my chamber, Matteo. There is a fresh barrel of Cyprian, and you shall tell us of your adventures. You, too, John."

So Matteo told in detail of his ride to Massiaf, and his sojourn in that strange place, and how he and the Assassins had journeyed to Emesa and what transpired there, and how his cousin Feizul had given him the horse El-Manzur, and finally of his return to Massiaf and the bargain he had compounded with Sinan.

The prince quaffed bumper after bumper of the heady Cyprian, without any effect upon his head, as was his wont, and listened, enraptured, until Matteo mentioned the promise he had given to carry the Old Man's message to King Amalric.

"What?" he broke in. "Release you to Amalric! Your Old One may be a slayer of princes, but there are some things he can not force me to whilst I am in life. Nay, nay, Matteo, the message we will forward by a sure hand. But you I can not spare. I have been sufficiently ill at ease the while you have been absent on this venture."

Matteo would have answered, but John the Englishman, sitting just behind the prince, made a signal to him to desist.

"That is a matter we need not fret about for the nonce, dear lord," said John. "What we have to be thankful for is that Matteo hath returned unscathed from so perilous an errantry."

Afterward that night John came to Matteo's chamber.

"You must humor Bohemond," he said. "But are you, in sooth, anxious to visit Jerusalem?"

"Aye, lord."

"I feared as much. Well, there are weighty obstacles in your path. But take heart. Time and patience will alter opposition—and I think that when you go I will go with you."

Matteo's face lighted with pleasure.

"I might not ask for more than that, Messer John. And touching the obstacles, I have much confidence in the ingenuity of Sinan. 'Tis a shrewd scoundrel and a cunning."

A week passed, and Matteo did not again refer to his mission to Jerusalem. He resumed once more the routine of his court life, jousted with the young knights and squires, sang and recited for the prince and his nobles. Then one morning came a change. De Pugne, as usual brought the news.

"An embassy from the Constable of Armenia," he announced, bursting in upon Matteo without ceremony. "And he hath fetched hither the most beauteous troupe of dancing girls this side of Paynimry."

Matteo, who had seen the beauties of Sinan's Garden of Delight, was interested to inspect the new arrivals. As he walked with François through the palace they heard the strains of music from the Hall of Audience. From the door beside the dais they viewed an amazing spectacle.

Bohemond leaned forward in his chair, chin on hand, gaze fastened upon the dozen dancers who swirled in muslin draperies before him to the accompaniment of Persian musicians. His lords and knights were somewhat uncomfortable spectators with him. Several priests were scuttling from the hall with shocked expressions on their faces.

"Is this Babylon or a Christian city?" muttered de Pugne.

"Nay, I know not," answered Matteo, then caught the eye of John the Englishman, who motioned him toward the dais.

"Now is your time," murmured John in his ear. "Ask him again."

Matteo took Sinan's message, with its black seal, from his wallet, and stepped up to the prince's side.

"Here is a matter presses for decision, lord," he said. "King Amalric waits for it."

Bohemond waved him impatiently away.

"Do it if you must, Messer Matteo. You are over-anxious to leave us, 'twould seem. But we shall be amused."

As Matteo descended from the dais one of the Armenian suite, a tall man in a high felt hat, slipped by him.

"You see, Sinan hath found a way," were the words he whispered in Matteo's ear.

Matteo started. The figure was vaguely familiar. Could it be Kafur? But the man had disappeared in the crowd before he could identify him.

"What hath irked you?" asked de Pugne, who had stuck by Matteo. "Did not the prince say 'yes' to you? That was a clever thought of Messer John's. Look you, Matteo, I am for going with you. I have had enough of Bohemond's madness. I am master of my own sword, and I will even try Amalric's service for a space. Men say he is stingy, but forward in joust or open field. Will you have me, comrade?"

"Right gladly," responded Matteo. "You speak in a good hour. But here is Messer John. You seem joyous, fair lord."

John the Englishman made a gesture of disgust.

"I have this moment acquainted Bohemond that I, too, was leaving him. He snarled, but said naught. I can stand much, but 'tis passing decency when a Christian prince takes a harem into his court. It is an evil stroke that the lord constable hath launched."

"'Twas not, in truth, the constable, I think, lord," said Matteo.

And he told of Sinan's promise, and of the whisper he had heard in the hall.

"So!" John the Englishman pursed his lips in reflection. "Now, what seeks Sinan from such a ploy? Doubt not, he hath the constable in agreement with him, for I knew one of the Armenian knights who accompanied the girls—and told him my thought of his mission, too."

"Mayhap, he desires to assure himself of Bohemond's inaction the while he intrigues with King Amalric," suggested Matteo.

" 'Tis that," assented John. "Aye, you have put your finger on it, lad. Well, what may we do against a diseased mind? 'Tis time we sought other scenes. You, too, de Pugne? Good! I shall have excellent companionship in my venturous old age."

CHAPTER XX

THE DEATH OF AMALRIC

FROM the eminence which was crowned by the ancient church of St. Stephen the four travelers looked down upon the northern walls of Jerusalem. The far-flung line of battlements, the domes and towers of the churches and palaces, the close-packed blocks of houses, stretched from the Valley of Jehoshaphat to the Valley of Gehinnon, with the bulk of Mount Moriah dominating the picture.

Streams of people were pouring toward the city, pilgrims from overseas, merchants of many lands, peasants from the surrounding country, knights and sergeants, squires and men-at-arms, priests and monks.

As Matteo and his companions approached the Gate of St. Stephen they observed a look of depression, almost of fear, in the faces of many beside them. There was no talking. Horsemen hung their heads. Clerks told their beads as they walked. The peasants and burghers displayed open grief, weeping and wringing their hands.

"Prithee, fair sir," said John the Englishman to a knight of the Hospital, who was ahead of them in the line waiting to pass the customs officers within the gate, "why is there so great dolor this day?"

" 'Tis easy to see you have journeyed from a distance, messer," responded the Hospitaler. "Our lord the king hath been ill and now grows worse. Men say he can not live."

"In sooth, that is bad tidings," agreed John, "but even kings must die."

"As for that," said the Hospitaler, "Amalric is a good lord; but men fear for their land and their own bodies, if he dies. His son, Prince Baldwin, is but a youth. The native barons and the foreign lords from overseas wrangle among themselves concerning who shall advise him. And the Saracens grow stronger day by day."

The line swayed forward at that moment, and John gave courteous thanks to the knight.

"It seems we are come in an anxious hour," he said to Matteo.

"All the more reason why I should push on and discharge my errand," Matteo replied.

"And I find me a lord to serve as soon as may be," said de Pugne.

"Youth rides in haste," smiled the old jongleur. "Yet sometimes youth is wise."

They rode as rapidly as the congestion permitted through the Street of St. Stephen. To the left hand rose the truncated pile of Mount Moriah, capped by the buildings of the Prætorium, the quarters of the Knights of the Temple and the splendid structures of the Templum Domini and the Palace of Solomon. As they passed the corner of the Via Dolorosa and entered the wide square in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, they were obliged to pick a careful path between the close-packed ranks of pilgrims, who knelt at prayer for the sick king.

The enormous hospital of the Knights of St. John resounded with the chanting of priests; but it seemed to the travelers that the knights in armor who lounged by the entrance wore expressions of boredom rather than piety. At the next corner, John the Englishman, who knew the way of old, turned into the Street of David which trended eastward through the city toward the palace enclosure on Mount Moriah.

The guards at the palace entrance halted them while an officer of the household was called. He had attended the court on the king's visit to Antioch, and remembered at once the young jongleur who had sung at Prince Baldwin's behest. John the Englishman needed no introduction. He was one of the best-known men of any degree throughout all the lands of Outremer, the hero of innumerable desperate ventures and daring embassies, let alone the echoing memories of his once matchless voice and glorious melodies.

"At another time no two would be more welcome," said the chamberlain. "But today we sit and mourn; and misunderstand me not, messers, if I say there is more call for priests than jongleurs."

"Certes, we would not seem to enforce ourselves upon you," answered Matteo. "But I bear a message of import from one Sinan, who is called the Old Man of the Mountain."

"A message from Sinan?" repeated the chamberlain in amazement. "The king hath ever had an interest in that strange man. But his illness grows upon him, and I know not——"

"At the least," suggested John the Englishman, "permit Messer Matteo to see some official of the court."

"Aye," returned the functionary, after a moment's deliberation. "I will call upon Messer William, the Archdeacon of Tyre, he who is governor to Prince Baldwin. Perchance, the prince himself will wish to hear what you say. 'Tis he, in sooth, now governs the realm."

He bade the guards see to the comfort of Ali and the horses, then conducted them into the palace. The anterooms were crowded with people, lords and ladies in silks and velvet stuffs, knights of the household in the mail they never discarded while on duty, emissaries from the Italian trading cities, potentates of the Church, jesters and jongleurs whose gay raiment made bright splotches of color against the drabness of the throng—but whose instruments and voices were muted and stilled.

"Bide you here," directed the chamberlain at last at the threshold of a curtained door where foot-sergeants stood at rest.

Courtiers whispered and plucked one another by the sleeve, eyeing the strangers with puzzlement. A gray-haired knight came up and recalled himself to John the Englishman. Matteo stood wrapped in his own thoughts. But de Pugne soon distracted his attention.

"Ha, Matteo," muttered the young knight, "there is the demoiselle Brygas!"

"And," he added, as Matteo looked up instinctively, "and her two sour-faced guardians."

Matteo could not avoid a smile as his glance strayed from the merry countenance of Brygas de Kergac, freely expressing her combined delight and surprize, and the frowning features of Renier de Chappes and his ill-favored son. Brygas waved him a greeting; her uncle and cousin after a long look of savage displeasure turned their backs upon him. But Matteo found keen satisfaction in acknowledging her greeting with a pointed courtesy which they turned away too late to miss.

"My faith, she is a fair maid!" quoth de Pugne. "Her uncle likes you little, 'twould seem."

"Nay, you overstate it, François," Matteo corrected him. "He hates me."

"'Tis misfortune for you," condoned François with somewhat empty sympathy. "He would never accept your suit."

Matteo was amused.

"My suit! You are mad, my friend. And for yourself, let me warn you, he intends her and her estates in Brittany for none other than his son."

As he said it something within Matteo rose up in silent rebellion against the glib phrases. No less pronounced was the spoken reaction of de Pugne.

"That slovenly varlet!" jeered François. "Zounds, 'twill be a sorry day for chivalry when a fox mates with a roe deer! I think we shall confess ourselves less than men if we permit it."

Matteo would have answered him, but the curtained doors swung open and the babble of the courtiers was suspended, as the chamberlain ushered out two men. Yet not exactly two men, for, although Baldwin had the stature of a man, tall, well-thewed, broad-shouldered, the face under his tumbled mane of yellow hair was the face of a boy, thoughtful beyond his years, intelligent, reflective, but nevertheless the face of a boy, a boy who had been unspoiled by royalty.

His companion was a priest of imposing appearance and authoritative manner. But it was the boy who spoke first, with a quick flush of interest.

"Why, 'tis Messer Matteo the jongleur!" he said. "Certes, I am glad of your coming —and yours, too, Messer John! And this young knight, whose face is familiar to me. You do well to visit us at Jerusalem, even though it be at a time of sadness. But I am told you bring a message to my father from Sinan!"

"That is true, lord," said Matteo.

"And what is this message?" spoke up the Archdeacon of Tyre in a grave voice.

Matteo took from his wallet the package

sealed with black wax and stamped with the sign of the clinched fist and triple-bladed knife. Baldwin slit it open with the point of his dagger, and scanned the pompous Arabic phrases with a hasty eye.

"He would turn Christian!" he exclaimed. "What think you of that, arch-deacon?"

"I am more interested in what Messer Matteo thinks of it," returned Father William.

"It means only Sinan's convenience," returned Matteo frankly. "He does not disguise that."

"But it can be turned to rare account!" declared the prince. "What? Now, when the kingdom is doubly troubled by my father's illness and internal dissensions. It could not have come at a better time. Can you not see the chance it gives, Father William?"

"Aye," agreed the churchman. "And it occurs to me that we should deliver it to the king. 'Tis a triumph for his statecraft, after all, that so desperate a knave as Sinan is brought to asking terms of us and not of the Saracens."

Baldwin clutched Matteo by the arm.

"It shall be done," he cried. "Messer Matteo, it grieves me to say it, but we know not at what moment my father may pass. He hath been a king so long, accustomed to give orders and not receive them. He scouts the leeches, and that hath been the making of his death. But what we may do to ease his suffering we strive for.

"I have two thoughts in my mind: To present to him Sinan's message to give him heart; and to hold you ready should he call for a jongleur, as he is like to do, for he is fond of your craft. Father William, will you take heed to Messer Matteo's companions?"

The guards stood aside, and Baldwin led Matteo through an inner anteroom, empty save for men-at-arms and servants. From it they emerged into a great chamber at the far end of which was a vast bed upon a dais. The chief barons of the realm stood in groups by the door. The patriarch and several of his bishops were an imposing company, mitres on heads, pastoral staves in their hands. A knot of priests knelt before a crucifix in a corner. By the curtains of the bed moved others—a shaven monk, fat and solemn; a bearded Greek doctor in a tall hat; a Saracen *hakim* in turban and spotless robes.

"Stand here," murmured Prince Baldwin.

Matteo stared about him while Baldwin crossed to the dais. It was the strangest scene he had ever beheld, in many ways the strangest he was ever likely to behold. A king was dying. The fortunes of factions, of a country, of a royal house, perhaps of all Christendom, hung poised in the balance.

Stray bits of phrases floated to his ears.

"Will he really die?" "He hath sealed his own death-warrant!" "How?" "This morning, in his pain, he besought the leeches for a purgative. The Saracen and the Greek, being men of wisdom denied him. But the monk yielded." "Ha, say you so——" "There is word Count Raymond of Tripoli——" "Who?" "Count Raymond—the king's cousin—he is riding at loose rein. He should be here by vespers." "What say the 'foreigners' to that?" "Oh, they belittle him." "They are overconfident." "Aye, de Chappes hath said——"

Matteo leaned closer at mention of his enemy's name. He could not see the speaker, behind the shoulders of several other men, but he hungered for further information. The next few words were indistinguishable.

"One way or the other, we shall have it out," said another voice. "If de Chappes hath his way, the 'Adventurers' will——"

A roar, hoarse, inarticulate, came from behind the swaying curtains of the bed.

"I want no more of you, leeches! Y'have done your worst! Let me be. I would die in peace, as becometh a warrior and a king! My name still means somewhat in Paynim ears. Aye, here is Sinan, who calls himself the Lord of Death, asks humbly for my suzerainty and will become a Christian. What say you, Templars all? Sinan, an apostle of Christianity! Sinan, the Lord of Death! Death! Phaugh! Must a king die?"

The leeches hovered on the dais steps—but fled as the bed-curtains were wrenched apart, and the giant frame of the king tottered into view, supported and partially restrained by Prince Baldwin.

The lords and prelates stood like men enchained, speechless. Only Matteo sped across the room and placed a carved oaken chair behind the king. Amalric sank down into its seat like a lion which has received a spear-thrust in the chest. His strength was exhausted by the mad effort.

"Ha, so!" he gasped. "I—would—pass—

in — open — always — hoped — die — in —mail——"

His head dropped forward on his chest.

"Dear lord," said Baldwin gently, "this is the jongleur, Messer Matteo of Antioch, who——"

The king's head lifted again.

"Where—are—knights?" he asked in a guttural whisper. "I—would—hear—rattle—armor—creak—harness——"

"Here is Messer Matteo, the jongleur of Prince Bohemond, will chant you a brave romaunt, sire," prompted Baldwin.

The king roused himself.

"Ho, jongleur of Antioch!" his voice burst forth in a bellow such as had carried over many a stricken field. "A song—a geste—a romaunt—to which a king may pass!"

Matteo caught up a lute from a table at the dais foot.

"The order is heard, O king!" he recited in the ringing, mellow voice of the jongleurs. "A brave romaunt for a brave king. A tale of a most valorous knight and a demoiselle beyond compare, like to the many who have ever delighted to honor the Lord of Jerusalem, of their loves and their sorrows, their trials and their pleasures. Hark to my lay!"

"Good—good," muttered the king. "Hast—a—pleasant—touch—jongleur."

Matteo's fingers swept the strings in an impassioned tempest of melody.

"Now, they sing and they say and they relate," he began.

"Aucassin was of Beaucaire,
Of the mighty castle there,
But his heart was ever set
On his fair friend Nicolette."

The golden voice filled the room, now like a trumpet-blast, now like an echo of fairy song. The winsome tale, fresh from the deft brain of its unknown Provençal author, had the company in thrall. The king's features, haggard and distorted by pain, became composed. His drooping head was lifted once more. A dim light shone in his eyes.

The story continued, alternating song and recitative, to the point where Aucassin armed himself to go forth to fight his father's foes as the price of the hand of Nicolette:

"Shirt and hauberk donned the lad,
Laced the helmet on his head,
Girt his golden-hilted sword,
Came the war-horse at his word,
Gripped the buckler and the lance,
At the stirrups cast a glance——"

"Pass forward!" shouted the king in a voice of thunder. "Christ and the Sepulcher! Pass——"

His head lolled back and he died.

Prince Baldwin eased the great body as it slipped. Matteo dropped his lute and sprang to aid him. Several priests and barons hastened forward. A spasmodic patter of Latin came from the corner where monks prayed before the crucifix. There was an abrupt silence. It seemed to Matteo as though a chill wind blew through the room. He found himself shivering.

"The king is dead," pronounced the patriarch. "Baldwin reigns!"

"Baldwin reigns!" repeated the company like children conning a lesson.

Men began to leave the room, eager to spread the news, and Matteo drifted on the tide toward the exit. He was surprized to feel a pressure on his arm, and looked over his shoulder into Baldwin's face.

"At your service, lord king," he said.

Baldwin gripped his hand fast.

"You are the first to name me so," he exclaimed. "'Tis an omen of friendship. Messer Jongleur, I like you. Had I my way, as Messer William, the archdeacon, will tell you, I would forego the duties of kingship and be a jongleur like yourself, aye, a trouvair, a singer of songs, a teller of tales. But my niche is fitted for me, and I must fill it. So I say to you again, be my friend, tarry here at Jerusalem."

"Lord, it would please me to serve you," answered Matteo with a thrill of liking for the comely, open young face. "But mayhap your lords——"

"Most of my lords are old enough to be my father and ever thinking on that fact," returned Baldwin impetuously. "You are wise, yet near my age, and have no politics to serve. I need you. Will you stay?"

"Aye, lord. Yet what will the barons——"

"I care not what they say or think. I choose my own friends. There are sorry days ahead. My father trusted me. He knew the dangers that would come after him, and gave me warning. Of all those about me only two may I trust, Father William, the archdeacon, and you."

"And me you have known a scant hour or two!" smiled Matteo.

"'Tis long enough. You have a rare voice, Messer Matteo. You shall be the king's jongleur. Aye, so it shall be."

CHAPTER XXI

THE BANISHMENT OF BRYGAS

BALDWIN sat very straight and stern in his chair of state at the head of the council board. Behind him stood Matteo. At his left hand were seated Father William of Tyre and John the Englishman, whose sage wisdom was prized at any court of Outremer. At his right hand sat his cousin, Count Raymond of Tripoli, the premier baron of the realm, lean, silent, alert. On the opposite sides of the long table were ranged the chief feudatories of the kingdom, including the grand masters of the Templars and the Hospitalers.

"Now that my dear lord and father hath been fitly laid to rest with his ancestors, lords, we are met to discuss the proffer of Sinan, whom some call the Old Man of the Mountain," announced Baldwin. "As you know, it was my father's policy to endeavor to weld him to our interests, notwithstanding my lord, the master of the Templars, would hear none of it."

"Nor will now, sire, if it can be helped," interjected the Templar.

"There is one opinion," commented Baldwin impartially. "What say the other lords? Sinan asks permission to accept Christianity and desires an alliance with us."

The debate boiled up tempestuously all along the table. The native-born barons and the master of the Hospital—who might be relied upon always to take the side hostile to the great rival order—espoused acceptance of the offer. The barons from overseas, led by Renier de Chappes, supported the objection of the Templar.

" 'Twould be a blemish upon our shields to accept the aid of one so foul as Sinan," declared de Chappes. "Moreover, why should we palter with his kind? What aid can he give us?"

"I would conceive any aid of value when we are so pressed for men and the paynims wax bolder every year," answered Father William.

"You are a priest, Messer Archdeacon," sneered de Chappes. "Doubtless you do not realize that one Christian knight is equal to ten Saracens, aye, or a hundred! Also, we have an inexhaustible store of recruits in our home lands."

"Where are they?" inquired John the Englishman.

"They will come if we invite them," asserted de Chappes confidently. "To begin with, lord king, 'tis meet to say the fame of this realm will be increased when due credit is given to those who have flown to its defense from overseas."

Baldwin frowned, but made no other acknowledgment of the covert insolence of the remark. Not so the native barons.

"Does the Lord of Nerak and Mardan complain because he has too few fiefs to hold?" called one.

"What more do your people want that they have not got?" inquired another.

"Will you have the king dethroned and a successor elected from your number?" demanded a third.

Faces flushed, hands toyed with sword-hilts. Baldwin's voice subdued the uproar.

"Peace, lords! What says my cousin of Tripoli?"

Count Raymond replied without emotion.

"Why, sire, it seems we are confronted with a situation which passes speculation. The facts are before us. The realm is drained of men. Whatever the reason, we no longer receive sufficient recruits from the devout in the Frankish home lands. And now we have an offer of assistance from one who is more feared by the Saracen princes than any other. If he accepts Christianity 'tis the first triumph of the Cross outside our marches.

"But, as I have said, there is no need for argument. Let us have the truth of the case from Sinan's messenger. How now, Messer Matteo, you are a wise youth and withal a trusty, by common report, let you give us your views concerning the matter. Of us all you alone have had speech with Sinan. What think you of him and his offer?"

The members of both factions gave over their disputes, and stared curiously at Matteo. Already, in the few days he had been at the court, a legend had grown up around his name. The fame of his voice and narrative gift had preceded him, and the mystery of his connection with Sinan and the strange circumstances of his origin served to intensify the gossip.

He did not hesitate. His thoughts were clear-cut—all the more definite because he found de Chappes on the opposing side.

"By your leave, lord king," he answered, "I agree with Count Raymond. Sinan is wholly selfish in this move. He fears the Templars. He would never be reliable. Yet if he seeks to make use of us, why should we not make use of him? 'Tis difficult to believe the news of his submission would be without effect."

"You speak for Sinan's purpose," cried the Master of the Templars.

"This man is half Saracen in blood!" exclaimed de Chappes.

"Aye, he wears Sinan's signet," added the Templar.

"And I have known him, aye, and fought beside him on occasion, these past four years, messers," interrupted John the Englishman. "He is as trusty a Christian as any here."

"Your words are no less than truth, Messer John," said Baldwin swiftly. "But 'twas needless to speak in Messer Matteo's defense. I do not take it kindly that lords should assail the king's jongleur."

"Nay, sire, you do us an injustice," protested the Master of the Templars. "We speak frankly out of our love of your person and the safety of the realm."

"Then, I prithee, speak more wisely," admonished Baldwin curtly.

There was nothing boyish in his manner. He was a king fully conscious of his kingship.

"The subject hath been fully debated, lords," he continued. "In my mind there is no doubt we should accept an offer which will win us prestige and time for better preparations to guard the future. But I shall be guided by your opinions. How say you all?"

The native barons, backed by the clerical members and the Master of the Hospital, mustered a clear majority; but the issue of the vote did not serve to clear the air.

"That is by for the moment," said the Master of the Templars, with a bitter look at Matteo. "But there is another subject of no less import, sire, which the council should decide without delay."

"To what do you refer, my lord?"

The boy king's voice was vibrant with dignity.

"Throughout your minority, lord, I think we are all agreed, there should be a guardian or protector of the throne. And who would be better fitted for the task than one of your grace's faithful barons?"

There was a rustle of interest around the board. This was the moot question of the hour. Who should have the guardianship of the Crown? To which faction would the rich prize go? And would the result be to create an uncrowned king and relegate Baldwin to the background?

"You have a candidate for this post, I must assume?" asked Baldwin smoothly.

"Aye, sire, who better than the Lord of Nerak and Mardan, whose zeal for the land and Christ's service have kept him on the marches——"

"Acquiring fiefs from men who had died in holding and upbuilding them," snapped the master of the Hospital.

De Chappes started up from his chair.

"My lord," he rasped, "you will make good——"

But Baldwin waved him down.

"You are in the presence of your king, my lords," he said simply. "I prithee recall to yourselves that though I be young, none the less is the Crown to be respected. But is your nomination the only one?"

"Not so, lord," cried several barons of the native faction.

"Count Raymond should be named," proclaimed the Hospitaler. "He is the chief man next the king in the realm, and he hath been born and bred among us."

"Nay, de Chappes," clamored a group of "foreigners."

"Tripoli!" stormed the native barons.

Baldwin pounded on the table with his fist.

"There will be time enough to settle this question, lords," he said. "Consider among yourselves, and strive to adjust your differences. We will return to it anon. For the present the council stands dissolved."

The council broke up in an atmosphere of dissatisfaction and gloom. The king withdrew with Count Raymond and Father William, and after a few words with John the Englishman, Matteo strolled into the anterooms, crowded with courtiers discussing the reports conveyed by the different barons. Renier de Chappes and his son were the center of a furious group gesticulating over the two slights which they conceived had been put upon them by the king's party.

From these two Matteo's eyes wandered about the big chamber and lighted upon the fair face of Brygas de Kergac. She was, as usual, surrounded by young knights and squires, but her glance crossed his and she made a slight gesture of invitation, at the same time gracefully shaking off her attendant train. He hastened across the room to meet her.

" 'Tis a vast honor to have speech with you," she jibed. "You are so preoccupied with your friend the king or the lord chancellor or Count Raymond or some other great one that a mere maid of the court must use diligence if she would come upon you."

Matteo laughed. The dexterity of her speech and her soft voice became increasingly attractive to him.

"The greatest honor I know of in Jerusalem is to stand by your side, Lady Brygas," he said, "but certes, there are those who would deny it to me."

He lifted an eyebrow in the direction of de Chappes, who had suddenly ceased talking with his supporters and was glowering across the room at Brygas and himself.

She frowned petulantly.

"They are always at me. Do but look at the face of Manasses?"

The countenance of the younger de Chappes was, indeed, like a thundercloud. So patent was their anger that it produced in Matteo a vague sense of exhilaration.

"Let them glower," he laughed. "All did not go as they wished in the council, and they have good reason to hate me afresh—aye, and their hatred shall not wane for lack of material if I have my way with them."

Her face sobered.

"You would do well to use care," she said seriously. " 'Twas in my mind to warn you."

"For that I thank you, dear lady. You are still on my side, are you not?"

"I am ever on the side of a valiant knight."

"But I am no knight——"

"Did we not have that out in Antioch?"

"Aye, but——"

"There are no 'buts' in this cause, Messer Matteo. What knight could have ventured farther afield than you or won greater honors?"

"Nay," replied Matteo, with beating heart. "I have my greatest honor in this moment."

Brygas regarded him curiously.

"I would I knew how far you might be credited," she sighed. "They tell wondrous tales of you; how all the ladies of Antioch and Byzantium——"

"I have never been in Byzantium."

"What boots that to a teller of tales? Hah, you may not answer me! And at the least, you may not deny you are become a very desperate hero of romance. Doth not Prince Bohemond, whom all know as half-mad, love you? Doth not Sinan, the Lord of Death, concern himself with you? Ah, but few know as much as I, concerning the winning of a certain ring——"

"And prithee, lady, if you care for my life, see that none other comes to share your knowledge?" interrupted Matteo.

"You are safe in my hands," she reassured him merrily. "But why should you fear who are the favorite of the king?"

"Our king is a brave king, lady, but overyoung, and my enemies are powerful. My way is not an easy one to tread."

"Prithee, then, Messer Matteo, in doubt or danger, take counsel with one who will be vigilant in your interest, even though she be held in the enemy's keep."

Matteo's eyes lightened.

"You have ever been a maid to stir a warrior's heart. Truly, I thank you and shall call——"

"Brygas!"

The cold voice almost at his elbow caused him to slew around. It was Renier de Chappes. Completely ignoring Matteo, her uncle drew her hand within his arm.

"But, lord," she started to protest with mutinous intent.

"I must have speech with you elsewhere," de Chappes cut her off.

But he could not cut off the look of farewell she threw back over her shoulder as she walked reluctantly away.

She was not present that night in the hall of audience when Matteo and John the Englishman and other jongleurs and trouvairs—for the court's brief mourning was at an end—entertained the company with song and story. In succeeding days he caught stray glimpses of her, always under escort of her uncle or Manasses. Then a week passed, and the court went hawking one day beyond Mons Gihon.

Matteo found himself separated from the king's party. He had ridden across the fields after a young peregrine that had missed its kill and swerved uncertainly in the lower sky. Behind him he heard the thud of hoofs, and François de Pugne rocketed up to his side.

"Have you seen Brygas de Kergac, Matteo?"

"Nay," denied Matteo.

"She broke away when the peregrine missed," explained de Pugne, picking up his reins. "I thought she rode this way."

"I have not seen her."

"'Tis likely that cur Manasses hath carried her off," said de Pugne morosely. "I shall yet hew him from his saddle."

He cantered on, and Matteo rode after the hawk, which was dropping slowly in erratic circles. De Pugne vanished in the trees on the mountain flank, and presently the battering of hoofs sounded again behind Matteo. He looked back, expecting to see another young knight in pursuit of Brygas, perhaps even Manasses. But his pursuer was the demoiselle, herself. He reined in, and forgot to notice when the peregrine soared aloft to swoop on an unfortunate pigeon

"If you do not wish my company, say so and be done with it," she panted, halting abreast of him.

Matteo laughed, and the blood drummed in his temples.

"If I did," he returned, "there are scores who would slay me for a smile from you. The fields are covered with knights and squires riding hither and yon in search of you. 'Tis impossible to fly a bird for the confusion you have created."

"Then are your troubles through me close to an end," she answered somberly.

"What? How say you, lady?"

Her face lightened somewhat at the anxiety in his voice.

"I am to be sent to Nerak," she explained. "To be kept there until I yield."

"Yield?"

"Oh, until I give in to their threats and agree to marry Manasses, my brutish cousin who hath bullied and abused me since we were children whenever opportunity served."

Now, Matteo was aware of hammers that pounded within his head and heart.

"Nay, nay," he cried out. "It can not be!"

"Then do you prevent it," she retorted fiercely. Her voice grated with anger. "Mark you, I will not wed that ape. Sooner would I cast myself from Baldwin's Tower."

"They shall not force you," he said, and the red mist before his eyes began to clear, but the pounding of the hammers continued, and he looked around in bewilderment to see Manasses de Chappes galloping toward them on a lathered horse.

"So it is, always," she said. "They watch me wherever I go. Oh, I shall suffer for this!"

"Let me speak to the king!"

"To what purpose? The king is but a boy, however much we may love him. He hath cares enough, the saints know! The father of Manasses is my guardian and every baron would rally to his defense did the Crown seek to interfere with his disposal of my hand."

"You are right, lady," admitted Matteo. "But you have asked my aid, and you shall have it. While I live, you shall not marry Manasses."

"But how prevent it?" she asked eagerly.

"I know not, but there are those who love you——"

Her face softened.

"But not you?" she murmured.

Matteo snatched her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"God knows I am not of those who may look honestly for your favor, sweet friend," he said, "but such as I am, I am yours."

Her eyes shone with a great light, but before she could make answer Manasses reined in at her side.

"My father sends me to bid you return to the king's company," he ordered gruffly, with never a glance at Matteo.

"I am returning," she answered shortly.

"Nay, you are to go with me."

"I will not go with you!" she flared.

Manasses lost his temper.

"You shall be soundly punished for this, girl! Have you not been forbidden to ride with the enemies of your family?"

Matteo leaned forward across her saddle so that his eyes met Manasses's squarely.

"My counsel is that you give over abuse," he said gently. "The Lady Brygas waits for Messer de Pugne, who will escort her to the king's company."

He had just seen de Pugne emerging from the wood on the lower slope of Mons Gihon and head toward them.

"Any one, so it be not you," returned Manasses, and maintained his position.

Brygas looked up once to note de Pugne galloping into the road, then turned her head to Matteo.

"You will not forget what you have said?" she whispered so low that Manasses might not overhear.

"Nay, lady," replied Matteo sadly, "but mayhap I have said too much. I have no standing with gentlefolk, I may be the friend of princes and kings, but I shall always be Matteo the Nameless, Matteo of Antioch, Matteo the jongleur!"

The light in her eyes burned brighter.

"You are yourself," she murmured. "Your fame is your own."

"I shall serve you as I may, but——"

He hesitated.

"Here is Messer de Pugne," he concluded inconsequentially as François pulled up in a spatter of dust.

"Look you, comrade," he hailed him, "here is the Lady Brygas beseeching your escort—and one whose conversation irks her. Wherefore, prithee, deal gently with her, be cold with her annoyer and so manage that you return to the king's side without having drawn steel."

De Pugne glared at Manasses.

"I will not answer for this watch-dog's safety," he growled. "But the Lady Brygas need not concern herself for his annoyance. He will keep his distance or feel the whip."

Manasses flushed uncomfortably.

"Brave words," he sneered. "Yet I have my duty to do, and shall do it, despite you. It grows late, and we must depart, cousin, with or without this knight's company."

Brygas paid no attention to him, but maneuvered her horse so that de Pugne was between her and Manasses. She waved her hand to Matteo.

"Forget not your pledge," she called, and gave her mount the spur.

Matteo could not trust himself to answer He watched her and her strange escort out of sight, sitting as motionless as El-Manzur's high spirits would permit.

"I am mad," he muttered to himself over and over again. "Who am I that—Nay, she doth not understand. I am mad—mad! Ruin for both! Aye, certes, for her! De Chappes I might humble, but can I use her for my ends? Nay, nay! Blessed Virgin hear me, I can not, I can not!"

He recovered some measure of self-control and resumed his desultory quest of the lost peregrine. But his thoughts dealt entirely with the coil in which he found himself.

"She must not wed Manasses," he reflected. "But who? François, perchance. Nay, nay, I can not! I can not! And am I not as selfish as de Chappes? François is a gentle knight and my comrade. Far better he than—than—any other. He loves her. He is worthy. Aye, François it should be."

So Matteo schooled himself, riding at loose rein, very sore at heart. Forgetting, too, as many men have forgotten, that a woman's heart may not be schooled or turned aside from an established goal.

TO BE CONCLUDED

GooLash

by

BEN F BAKER

Author of "Mis-Deal," "70 Below," etc.

I JES' finished readin' about a feller that gets sentenced to be cooked, electric, for imbeddin' a lot of number two buckshot in another gent's innards. Seems like these two wahoos loves the same girl. An' both of 'em wins out. One of 'em wins the lady an' a stomachful of lead, an' the other gets a whole page in the Sunday supplement and the right to apply for admission at the pearly gates on an exact, certain date.

He's taken care of complete. He knows jes' what he's goin' to do. 'Course, the gent with the lead in his gizzard gets a couple of months' start over the long trail; but he leaves unprepared, so to speak. He don't get no time at all to buy him some new moccasins or even ask directions.

On the other hand, the shotgun-artist's got more'n two months to read up on the trail signs, look over his mushin'-outfit and generally get ready for the trip. Yet he's kickin'. He squawks an' yells and hollers an' raves all over that supplement-page I done spoke of, an' he winds up by announcin', "Justice is blind."

He makes me sick! He's jes' like every other weaklin' that falls into a hole that he's done dug himself. He lands head-first on the bottom, sprains his neck an' then lays there hollerin' for the neighbors to come an' pull him out. An' the very first thing he does when he gets back on top is to cuss out his luck an' declare that justice is blind.

It's sickenin'. She ain't blind! She ain't even near-sighted! Jes' because, 'way back, some fool paints her likeness with a bandage over her purty eyes, is no sign she can't see. It's more'n likely she wears that rag to ease the bustin' headache she's got. An' it's purty near sure she gets that same headache tryin' to figure out a square deal for us fool mortals.

Believe me the lady can see, all right; an' give her a free hand an' jes' half a chance an' she'll take a peek out from under her blinders an' dish up a square, even break for everybody, every time. Sometimes she'll do even better'n that. Lemme prove it:

'WAY back in '96 Manook is maybe the most high-toned camp on the whole Yukon. She ain't very big, figgerin' population, an' she ain't none spectacular as a perducer; but she sure is hide-bound an' select an' exclusive. Out of a total gross population of purty near forty souls—which don't reckon no Injuns—there ain't no more'n half a dozen chechakos.

All the rest of us is sourdoughs—old-timers, right an' proper. Most of us has been "Inside" for ten years or more. On top of that, every man of us, tenderfeet an' all, is miners an' prospectors. Every galoot in camp is a horny-handed son of toil, an' a perducer.

Even Rory Mack, who owns the Pioneer Saloon, puts in the Summer workin' a claim on Little Eureka. Not that Rory is a freak or anywise different from barkeeps the world over, or that he labors that way simply 'cause he likes the work.

No, sir! As a saloon man Rory is twenty-four carat pure an' a thousand fine; an' he lives up to the traditions of his tribe like a true knight of the wet towel an' the white apron. He toils through the Summer that way because while the water's runnin' nobody's in town. Winters, of course, the Pioneer is open night an' day an' pervides recreation an' regrets for all hands, accordin' to their means.

So you see, we don't harbor airy single dead-head. The Klondike strike is still away off, an' so far the outside world ain't hardly touched us. Therefore, no doctors, lawyers, policemen an' such is at all present in our midst.

We're a clean-strain, high-toned onsomble, workin' hard Summers an' passin' the Winters by sleepin' late mornin's an' the rest of the time pleasantly lyin' to each other about our antecedents an' accomplishments. Sometimes we varies this program slighly by sniffin' an' sneerin' at any remarks or opinions our five or six tenderfeet may venture to air.

Yes, sir! We sure do keep them yearlin's in their proper places. So with plenty of grub an' a surplus of hootch life is full an' joyous, an' we ain't got a thing to sigh for except the dawn of another day.

Well, it's along toward the end of September. 'Most everybody has done arrived in town, an' we're all busy outfittin', layin' in firewood an' generally gettin' our cabins in shape so's we can hole up comfortable for the long frost. There's maybe two dozen of us millin' around in the store that mornin' when, sharp an' clear, we hear the splittin' screech of the *Healy's* siren.

Seein' as she's the last boat of the season, that whistle means a considerable lot. For one thing it means the last mail for eight months, not to mention a big pile of newspapers an' magazines to hearten us through the Winter. We even acquire some fresh spuds, maybe. Man, we sure do swarm down to the beach in a body an' *en masse*.

An' sure enough, there she comes round the Russian Creek bend, two white ribbons of steam trailin' from her stacks, a big, creamy wave a-curlin' from her bows, stately an' calm as a princess. She sure is a lady. She's purty. She surely is.

But all the same it seems like a year before she finally noses in an' ties up in front of the store. Her gang-plank no more'n hits the gravel before we start aboard. But we don't make it. No, sir! Half-way up that plank we stop, sudden!

Then we back off slow an' line up on the beach, hat in hand. No, they ain't packin' no corpse ashore. Nothin' like it. On the contrary, the livest-lookin', cheeriest-faced little lady we've seen in many a moon comes trippin' down that gangway, a-smilin' an' bowin' right an' left as we open up to let her through. An' she don't miss nobody with that smile. She makes a clean sweep, but she don't stop.

She heads straight for the store. An' right behind her comes a Injun deck-hand staggerin' under a whale of a trunk. She's goin' to stay!

Seems like we lose interest in them magazines an' newspapers aforesaid. I guess we even forgit to see about them chechako spuds. Anyway nobody goes aboard the boat until a whole lot later in the day. But you can gamble we keep a couple of eyes apiece on Jack's store. An' we're rewarded.

By an' by out comes the lady in tow of Jack's Injun wife, an' the two of 'em mushes up the trail toward Jack's cabin. Now, 'course, you understand that we're a polite and decorous bunch of *hombres* an' none whatever inquisitive concernin' any lady or her personal affairs; but right away we surge into the store. An' Jack obliges.

Seems like this lady is a nurse, an' she's aimin' to Winter in Manook. 'Way back in Poland somewheres she reads about our camp in her home-town paper an', learnin' that we're plumb minus on white women, she, bein' without no kin or fireside ties whatever, decides to throw in with us.

She don't speak American very good; but she ain't worried. She figgers that talk ain't much necessary in her business nohow, 'cause she aims to make a livin' by nursin' us when we're sick. Well, sir, when Jack finishes his wah-wah, we jes' stand there, stupid. A white woman in camp, and she figgers on nursin' us!

"She's a mile off the pay-streak," Scar-Face Ed finally announces. "There ain't nobody been sick in this camp since Summer before last—the time Dutch Bill et that wolverine, thinkin' it was cub bear."

"We're lucky at that," allows Tommy Andrews, speakin' up quick. "We sure are a fortunate bunch of wahoos," he declares. "While I'm proud to be a dweller in this bustlin' metropolis, I'm free to admit that up to now we been dealin' from a short deck. But here comes this angel of mercy, an' by her mere presence adds that last refinin' touch that makes us a full civic body, finished an' complete.

"Another thing," he continues. "I ain't feeling so well. I'm all het up inside, an' I'm sure feelin' a heap bad."

"You listen to me," snaps Dick Peters. "Everybody starts in on this race with an even break. You give that lady a week to get domiciled an' acclimated before you acquire any spontaneous maladies. Until all hands gets time to line up for a even chance you're goin' to stay well."

Which is fair enough. Nobody can kick at that. So, everything bein' understood that way, Manook takes on her normal gait an' Time starts mushin' along same as former. Nothin' is changed except that about forty of us spends the next week in shavin', sewin' on buttons, hatin' each other, tryin' on new shirts an' figgerin' night an' day on how to become the camp's first invalid.

In the meantime the cause of all this here activity has done moved into one of Jack's extry cabins, unpacked her duds an' settled down. She makes a couple of trips to the store an' buys herself some grub. An' them's the only times we get a peek at her.

But we hear a lot.

Accordin' to Jack she's got a name that's made out of nothin' but "K's" and "I's" an' looks like a noodle that's done had a cramp. Jack states positive that nobody can say that name without treatin' everybody within ten feet to a shower-bath.

He also informs us that the object of our curiosity is a lady, meanin' that she's one of them foreign nobility of some kind. Tommy Andrews chips right in an' expresses his belief that, from her pleasant an' gracious manner, she's probably a duke; but Jack surmises she's more likely a countess. Jack is a wise old owl, so we take his tip, an' "Countess" she is to the end of the chapter. After which we weave along to our several teepees, to sit in solitude an' figger some more on how to get sick.

AS USUAL, Tommy Andrews makes the first bet.

He meanders down to the store next mornin' an' announces that he's in awful agony. He describes himself as bein' right on the edge of the grave with nothin' but a toe-hold on a pile of loose dirt.

He coughs an' spits an' rolls his eyes an' yells to Jack to send for the nurse, quick, before it's everlastin'ly too late. There's a few of us on hand when Tommy pulls this stuff, so we throw him out into the street an' advise him to go see the nurse, personal.

An' blamed if he don't do it!

He takes our tip, *pronto*. He's sure got some nerve. At that he needs it, for purty soon he comes shufflin' back, slow an' dejected.

This time he does look sick, sure enough. For a while he won't talk, but after buyin' him a few drinks we learn that the Countess asks him a lot of questions about his habits an' customs an' then advises him to go home an' cheer up.

"You ain't none whatever sick," she tells him in her broken American.

"What you need is more sleep an' less hootch," she states. "Go to bed nights an' don't take a single drink for a month."

An' the poor clam promises.

An' then she laughs at him!

Poor Tommy's stack of chips looks mighty small; but the boy's attempt bears fruit an' proves somethin'. This here Countess is a real lady an' a sure enough nurse. No monkey-shines goes, whatever. 'Course we knew this right along; but somehow the proof of it cheers us up a lot.

So once more we disperse, each galoot once again filled with hope an' longing. Once more we unanimously selects ourselves as the lucky victim that will eventually lead our white female population to the mission chapel. But there's a big fly in our mush—Tommy.

Naturally after his crushin' defeat nobody tries to get sick any more. Therefore, there bein' no patients, the Countess' nursin' business falls off to nothin' before it ever gets started. In the meantime Mr. Tommy keeps close cases on everybody an' everything. Then he cooks up a new scheme.

After about two weeks has faded into the dim past, he calls on the Countess an' requests her will she take him for a boarder. He explains that while he lives plumb over to the other side of town the walk to meals three times a day will keep his mind off of the hootch he ain't drinkin' an' therefore do him a heap of good.

He adds that he's a rank failure as a chef an' vows that he can't stand his own cookin' no more. An' these here last statements is gospel. Tommy is probably the worst cook on the whole river.

Anyway he puts up such a pitiful plea that he persuades her, an' Mr. Andrews becomes the first boarder in the first an' only boardin'-house in camp. The energy an' enterprise of that Tommy-fox is certainly no less than amazin' an' ridiculous. He's a wise young fool, that Tommy is, an' the camp loses no time in so informin' him.

Likewise, five of our more enterprisin' spirits takes the trail he breaks an' acquires eatin' privileges at the Countess' table, bein' duly enrolled as holders of regular fodder-tickets. When things gets to this point the boozshwah an' the rabble lays off, rightly concludin' that the race lays between the lucky six.

Then everything once more settles down to normal or below an' events starts followin' each other in their regular order, barrin' sometimes when one of 'em breaks out of line an' crowds in ahead of its turn. The first time this happens is about a week after the Countess opens up her bean-emporium.

We're all sittin' around in the Pioneer that night when in busts Tommy, a-wearin' a smile so wide he can whisper in his own ear.

"Gentlemen," he shouts, "I win; step up, all hands, an' name it."

Well, sir, he sure startles us. To put it mild, these here remarks is wholly unexpected at this time, an' prematoor. They undoubtedly sets us back. Though of course we know exactly what Tommy means, Dick Peters voices our desires when he says:

"Calm yourself. Then explain some. Just what do you win?"

"The Countess," Tommy busts out. "She's jes' promised me, an' we're goin' to be married in two weeks come Sunday," he gasps.

"An' she done gimme permission to notify you all an' to buy a drink," he finishes, blushin'.

"Here's to her, and God bless her," says Dick, gulpin' his at a swaller. "An' may you always have strength in your arm to smooth the trail for her little feet."

Considerin' that Dick has been played as a favorite, this is mighty right an' handsome, specially as he shows that he's bad hurt, spite of all he can do to hide it.

Tommy an' him shakes, an' then Tommy

orders another round, an' it ain't long till we're singin' "We Won't Go Home until Mornin'." An' we don't.

Next day all the Countess' boarders resigns except Tommy. They feel that it wouldn't be delicate in them to keep eatin' off a lady that's engaged an' got a lot of other things to think about besides rustlin' grub.

"At that we're glad we're through," allows Rory Mack. "It's been a ordeal an' us boarders is mighty glad to be free."

Now this here statement puzzles us complete at the time. Us outsiders right along has been plumb envious of the Countess' payin' guests; but before long we learns somethin'.

In the meanwhile, Time once more gets a good grip on the gee-pole an' mushes on an' Progress slides along a few feet further, while the camp rests. All we aim to do for the next two weeks is to envy an' congratulate Tommy. About ten days slips by; then one mornin' this is what we see tacked on the store door:

> **NOTIS**
>
> **I the undersigned hereby calls a miners' meetin on Tommy Andrews at 8 o'clock to nite P. M. This here meetin is for breach of promis in Jack's Store.**
>
> **Sined:**
>
> ***Dick Peters.***

Maybe you think this proclamation don't start some excitement! When I say that the discovery of this here concise epistle is equal to a bomb explosion on our main an' only thorofare, I'm puttin' it mild.

Here we are, a heart-broken bunch of ex-Romeos, grievin' daytimes over our lost chances an' spendin' the brighter hours that comes along with nightfall preparin' to do full honor to the camp's first set of nuptials; an' then—Bang! Away goes our prospective festivities like a busted balloon. What makes it worse is a iron-clad custom we got, to wit: When notice of a miners' meetin' is posted all hands is honor bound not to discuss the matter at issue before the meetin' is called.

Take it from me, by night we're all swelled up an' ready to bust.

AT FIVE minutes to eight Dick Peters breezes into the store. That makes it unanimous. Every man in camp is already there waitin'.

Right away somebody proposes Hank Somers for chairman an' Billy Elms for secretary. They're elected by acclamation. Then Dick states his reasons for callin' us together.

"Gentlemen," he says, "I done called this meetin' to ask you to ladle out a lot of justice to a rattle-brained skunk that sure needs it. Through the triflin' activities of one of our number the fair name of this camp is about to be smeared with a heap of mud.

"I don't aim to get personal, but unless Tommy Andrews goes through with the weddin' ceremonies he done promulgated he breaks the heart of a sure-enough good an' sweet lady. Besides which, he gets himself branded as a quitter, an' he blacks the eye of this camp till it shines. I don't figger we allows him to pull off any such play.

"Here's what's the matter: Me bein' Tommy's intended best man, I goes to see him frequent to cheer him up an' advise him.

"Last night I moseys over to his cabin as usual; an' just as soon as I get inside he informs me that the layout is turned face down an' the game's closed. He announces that he ain't goin' to marry nobody, an' he refuses to give any reason whatsoever."

"Hang him!" yells Missouri Bill.

"Order!" the chairman hollers. "We ain't goin' to hang nobody till we knows exactly what for. Them kind of remarks don't go—at least, not yet."

"Where's the lady?" old Jack inquires. "I move that Rory Mack be appointed as a committee to invite her to attend this meeting at once."

He's a wise old owl, is Jack.

Rory, bein' duly appointed, starts immediate. The meetin' marks time.

In about fifteen minutes Rory comes back and reports.

"It ain't no use," he states. "I seen her, an' she won't come. More'n that, she won't say nothin' about nothin', only that she positive refuses to appear against Tommy, that she wishes him well an' hopes we don't hurt him an' that her heart's busted. She starts cryin', an' I come away."

"Hang him!" Missouri Bill yells.

"Gentlemen," Scar-Face Ed hollers, jumpin' up on the counter, "this here is a —— of a note! It's awful! Moreover, this is easy the worst an' most important case we've ever been called on to decide.

"I don't know hardly what to say, at

all," Ed admits, "but I got a idea. Owin' to the aforesaid importance of this matter, I moves that Rory be sent back to the Countess to request her will she accept the decision of this meetin'. If she says, 'Yes,' then I move you some more that we elect a judge, a clerk an' a jury to try this case, regular court-fashion. Maybe we don't ever get a chance to handle a breach of promise suit again. Let's do her up in style."

"Second the motion! Hang him!" yells Missouri Bill.

Rory makes the second round trip in less'n ten minutes.

"I resign," he announces soon as he gets back inside. "I ain't goin' over there no more. She's still a-cryin', an' I can't stand it! She asks me will we let this thing drop; but if we won't, she asks us not to pull off any personal violence on Tommy. After I promise her she agrees to accept any verdict we renders. An' I'm done."

"If we can't do anything to this here culprit what's the use of doin' anything?" inquires Scar-Face.

"Hang him!" Missouri whoops.

"You holler that jes' once more," Hank cautions, "an' you go out. Nominations for judge an' jury, with the usual trimmin's, is now in order. Let's adopt Scar-Face's idea an' try this case accordin' to Hoyle. I'm confident we arrive at a verdict that satisfies the Countess an' the camp."

Right there we make a record. Five minutes is enough to elect Hank Sommers judge an' Billy Elms clerk, while Tom Drew is voted in as prosecutin' attorney with Pete-the-Pig slated as Tommy's lawyer. Both Tommy an' the Pig is plumb disgusted with this selection, but accepts because they got to. Twelve names is grabbed out of a hat, an' with the jury complete Manook's first court is organized.

"The court comes to order," says Hank. "What's the charge ag'in' this polecat that trifles with a lady's affections?" he inquires.

"Breach of promise, your honor," replies Tom Drew. "An' I move that the jury retires an' starts figgering out a verdict. The court hears what Dick Peters charges, an' unless the defendant's got a alibi what's the use of anybody sayin' any more?"

"Say, what kind of a trial is this here anyway?" Tommy yells, jumping up. "What for have I got a lawyer, an' what for is this court for?" he wants to know, real peevish.

"That's right," declares Tommy's lawyer, suddenly wakin' up. "You smarties done elected a regular court an' wished this here job of defendin' this wall-eyed Piute on to me. You hollered for a trial with all the fixin's. You're goin' to get it! Seein' that the Countess refuses to take a hand in these obsequies, I ask that the court appoint some one to act in her place so's counsel for the defense can get said party on to the stand an' bring out a lot of news favorable to my client."

"She's a good idea," Hank agrees. "Actin' thereon, the court hereby appoints Doc Hatch to be the Countess *pro tem.*"

"I'll be hanged if I'll be her totem!" Doc roars. "I won't do it! I ain't goin' to be nobody's wooden image. Why, darn your fool hide, do you think 'cause I'm a old man you can force me to clown for this bunch of rattle-heads? This here whole camp has gone bug-house! What do I know about this crazy mix-up? An' I make a fine lady, with nigh on to a foot of whiskers, don't I? You go to ——!" he invites, slammin' his cud ag'in' the side of the stove, where she sticks an' fries like a flapjack.

"You'll serve or I'll fine you six ounces for the benefit of the mission," states the court.

Hank knows that the old Doc packs a fat poke of dust.

"All right, I'll serve," Doc snarls. "An' look out for me," he warns.

"Now that we're provided with a plaintiff the case is two-sided, as the law requires," Hank allows. "Defense will start in."

"Call the Countess," snaps the Pig.

Old Doc answers by haulin' a bottle of hooch out of his shirt an' tiltin' a whale of a snort into himself. Then he glares at the judge while he stows the bottle away, offerin' nobody nothin'. After which the old coyote ambles over to the witness chair, stows away a big chew of fine-cut an' sits down. The ice is two inches thick on the old man's face.

Now, this here cool behavior of the Countess *pro tem*, kinda flusters the Pig; but he likewise salts away a chew, hitches up his pants an' cuts loose.

"You're a nurse, I understand," he remarks, polite.

"That's me," Doc agrees, never battin' an' eye. "I'm a nurse. I'm nursin' a dude of a grouch. An' when I gets this peeve nursed an' coddled into what I considers a healthy an' robust condition I'm goin' to turn her loose on the officers of this here court. I got a idea that when the finish is complete you embryo law-sharks is gonna wish you never was born."

"Lookin' at you makes me wish that, right now," the Pig comes back. "Now, madam, in spite of the fact that you're the plaintiff in this here case, I'm figgerin' that you're goin' to be on the square. An' I hope you bears up through this tryin' ordeal with calmness an' fortitude. Was you ever married?"

"I was," admits Doc. "Back in Montana in '76 I was married to a widder for more'n two months."

"That was nice," the Pig beams.

"You're a liar! It was fierce!" Doc explodes.

"Well, anyway," the Pig allows, "you got more or less savvy of married life. That makes you competent to sustain what I'm goin' to prove.

"Your honor, I'm goin' to show that this white-livered client of mine is plumb justified when he declines to buy chips in this matrimony game.

"I'm goin' to prove that marriage is a brace game wherein the wheel is fixed to stop on any number that carries the lady's chips.

"I'm goin' to point out that any time a lady leads a gent to the altar she's inveiglin' him into a lifetime session where she holds four aces an' a pick-handle ag'in' his bob-tail straight all the time. He can't win.

"Moreover, we leave the Countess, who is sure enough a fine woman an' a real lady an' a heap too good for this fool Tommy, plumb out of this trail from now on. I'm certain this court departs from the established customs of our spotless judiciary an' refuses to drag any lady's name unduly into the public view. Instead we picks on her proxy, who is a tough old pelican, without hardly no feelin' nohow; an' we lays bare his married life an' proves thereby that man breaks the most trail when mushin' alone."

"Go ahead, you brayin' jackass," old Doc invites. "Help yourself."

Acceptin' his own invitation, he drags out his bottle an' lowers the high-mark about two inches.

"An' let's see who wins out," he adds, stowin' the hooch away in his shirt.

"I object to the plaintiff a-drinkin' alone in open court this way," the Pig protests, his mouth waterin'. "I asks the court to confiscate this old sot's bottle."

This request makes a big hit with Hank, who starts toward old Doc immediate.

"Just a minute," the old man advises, pointin' his finger at the advancin' judge. "Anybody that tries to bereave me of this here bottle is goin to lose a heap of good red meat. Besides you ought to be ashamed of yourself, a-tryin' to lay your big rough hands on a lady," he tells Hank, grinnin'.

Hank sits down.

"Go on with the case," he orders, lookin' kinda red and foolish.

"Tell the court," the Pig commands, "how come you to get hitched up to this widder lady?"

"How do I know?" Doc counters. "She up an' marries me same as all them females picks out a weaklin' an' hog-ties him."

"Was you happy any, durin' the time you was spliced?" the Pig queries.

"Not me," Doc denies. "But I thought I was."

"Fine," the Pig commends. "Now then, what ends your married bliss?"

"A bull-whacker from Fort Benton," Doc replies. "That spouse of mine grabs this here bull-freighter an' six hundred dollars of my money an' pulls out overland for Omaha. But I done hear afterward that this bull-proddin' gent gets away the second day out."

"Fair enough. I'm glad to hear it," the Pig murmurs. "Now from what you done said I concludes that you regards marriage as a snare an' a pitfall an' that you don't approve of same. An' I'm askin' you, am I right?"

"About half," Doc qualifies. "I'm with you on the snare an' pitfall part; but at that I heartily approves of the wedded state. Nothin'd give me more happiness an' joy than to see you an' five or six more sap-heads that I could name hitched for life to a strong-minded, energetic, venturin' gal like the one what harpooned me. I approves of such a state of affairs so strong that I hereby wishes you all jes' that kind of luck, an' I now drinks to such a hallowed contingency," he declares, reachin' for his bottle.

But the law can't stand no more. The judge, the clerk an' both attorneys is on their feet simultaneous with the appearance of Doc's hooch.

"I object!" Tom Drew yells. "I asks the court to stop this here old goat from torturin' all hands this a way."

"Hang him!" pleads Missouri, unrebuked.

"You-all knows better than to act up like you're doin'," says Hank, scowlin' mighty mean. "What's the big idea, tryin' to undignify this here court of the people?" he asks, nice an' cold.

"I ain't never felt none better since '76," Doc explains. "An' I blames this bottle. Therefore I aim to imbibe the rest of this here rejuvenatin' elixir an' do this plaintiff job right."

"Leave the stand!" Hank roars. "You miserable old wolf, you sets up there in plain sight of this court an' anoints your gullet time after time without once offerin'. What do you-all mean? You take jes' one more solo drink out of that bottle an' I comes down there an' yanks out the long half of your wish-bone!"

"I thanks you for them words," old Doc replies, smooth as oil. "I now perceives that I'm even an' maybe a few blue chips ahead. I told you-all short-horns to leave me be," he reminds, movin' over into the crowd.

"Aside from the fact that you-all has acted like a regular lawyer by askin' a lot of fool questions an' bringing out a heap of stuff that ain't got no bearin' whatever on this case, I don't see where we're any noticeable distance from the startin'-point," Hank says to the Pig, evenin' up for what old Doc done to him.

"You done noble, an' the court congratulates you," he adds, spillin' his grouch all over the scowlin' Pig. "Now, as the defense has done had a crack at the plaintiff the prosecution will take a shy at the defendant. That way we follows the rules an' the law, an' we evens things up. After that the jury gets instructed. Proceed," he orders, glarin' at old Doc.

"Tommy Andrews," Tom Drew calls.

TOMMY turns as red as a moose-liver. Then in less'n a minute he fades to the pale, pure hue of a new of a new snow-bank. He sure looks sick. Understand, the boy ain't scared none, but the poor —— is sure feelin' mighty bad.

He weaves over to the witness-box an' sits down like he's plumb tired out. Could he get it, the remains of Doc's bottle is plainly what he needs. He looks so plumb miserable that a wave of sympathy or somethin' seems to roll over the whole room, for even the prosecutin' attorney foregoes his bullyin' p'erogatives an' opens up on Tommy with a soothin' mildness that's pleasant to see.

"You-all," he addresses Tommy, "is charged with persuadin' a lady to promise to marry you an' then refusin' to go through with said contract yourself. You know how this camp regards a good woman. As you ain't goin' to be fit for hardly nothin' if this charge is proved ag'in' you, I'm askin' you to tell the court an' the camp how come you to make this awful misplay. You surely understand that you can't go Lotharioin' around this way without a heap of potent reasons. So shoot! She's your deal."

"I'm guilty," Tommy acknowledges, losin' no time. "An' I'm not holdin' you-all to that promise that Rory done made to the Countess. All I asks is that you listen to me first. When I'm through explainin', I swallers whatever dose you mix up for me, an' I sure try not to make no faces when she goes down.

"I'm here to admit that I sure was a puffed-up toad when I win that lady away from this whole camp. I'm truly a proud and happy *hombre.*

"I figger out that I outluck everybody on the whole river; an' I want you-all to know that so far as the lady is concerned, personal, I still feel that same way, only more so. There ain't no sweeter, nor better, nor purtier woman nowheres. She's nothing less than a heart flush, royal.

"But, gentlemen, I don't know hardly nothin' about the gentler sex, an' believe me, knowin' 'em counts! I'm free to confess that in handlin' this affair I made one whale of a mistake.

"If I ain't so blamed anxious to spend all the whole time hoverin' around my prospective wife, I no doubt pulls off a marriage all ignorant an' happy, an' this trial ain't never on the cards. But no—I got to satisfy my longin' for her company by persuadin' her to let me board at her table. An' believe me, gentlemen, that's where I done guessed wrong. She mighty near killed me in less'n two weeks."

"Do you accuse this lady of plottin' murder?" Hank thunders.

"Not intentional, but she might as well," Tommy declares. "There's me, as love-sick as a yearlin' calf, bound down by my own request to feed off that lady's table three times a day forever an' ever, with no chance or right to quit or complain, compelled to swaller them awful concoctions that she makes, world without end, amen. An' I endures it day after day an' comes back smilin' an' quiverin' with fear, meal after meal.

"Ask the other boarders," he begs.

"I know I done a fearful wrong—twice," he acknowledges. "I hurts a good woman's feelin's, an' I plays the quitter. But nothin' you can do to me equals by half the mere thought of eatin' that grub three times every day," he chokes.

"Whatever was the matter with this here grub?" Tom Drew inquires.

"Everything," Tommy asserts. "She maybe cooks all right over in Poland; but here her grub is nothin' less'n poison! While them other boarders is there it ain't so unbearable bad; but once they resigns an' she gets me alone, —— is sure let loose!

"She switches clean off of regular fodder an' feeds me nothin' but the favorite tidbits of them home-folks of hers, an' it's my belief that they're a zinc-lined lot of wahoos! The first dinner I eat alone with her she springs what she calls a surprize. She takes a hunk of moose-meat, a lot of onions an' maybe three or four cans of red pepper, an' she brews a mulligan what she christens 'Goo Lash.'

"When I first taste this here mash I think the recipe is maybe mistaken; but to please the cook I take on a liberal allowance, though it mighty near kills me to do it. It was jes' nacherally awful. Afterward I got to drink more'n a pint of hooch to stop the burnin' in my innards."

"What you kickin' about?" Missouri interrupts. " 'Pears to me any grub that acts thataway is mighty near ideal."

"You try mixin' red pepper with Rory's hooch," Tommy urges.

" 'Nother time, she meets me on the street an' she's all smiles," he continues. "She's jes' discovered that Jack's got a kit of salt herrin' in the warehouse, which I personal know them herrin's has been in camp for four years. She confides to me that I'm in for another palate-ticklin' jamboree.

"An' what can I do? I got to go to supper an' eat them —— herrin's an' say I like 'em! An' when I says that, she gets plumb tickled an' makes me eat some more! Gentlemen, it was jes' plain ——."

He's almost cryin'.

"An' how do you reckon she maltreats them herrin's?" he asks. "Them not bein' bad enough as they are, she boils the salt outen 'em, an' then she dishes 'em up covered with a gravy made outa molasses!" he fairly yells. "She made me eat dried cabbage cooked in vinegar an' sugar! She put raisins in the soup! I'm a wreck! I ain't goin' to take no more chances!" he vows, hollerin' at the top of his voice.

Without doubt these statements is sure enough serious.

"The court admits," says Hank, weighin' his words careful, "that what you says changes the bettin' quite a little. I've done heard that them Polanders is mighty ruckshus an' all the time fightin', an' I believes it. If they feed on such grub as you describes they nacherally feels a heap sore at everybody. Moreover, without meanin' no disrespect I'm convinced that the Countess needs a lot of remodelin', culinary.

"But that don't bring us no nearer to the end of the trail.

"You admits that you turn this lady down cold after she consents to become your wife, an' for that we all knows there ain't no excuse, no time, nowheres, nor no fit punishment. Therefore, since any more argument by either side is plumb futile, there ain't nothin' more to say, so the court now charges the jury.

"You gentlemen—" turnin' to the jury—"will now retire to the warehouse; an', followin' the manner of juries, you will pay no attention to nothin' except your own personal feelin's, an' arrive at a verdict accordin'. But the court hopes that you will figger out some kind of a punishment fitten for this here Tommy—somethin' that makes him a little slower in pledgin' his word to women an' that also pays him for the wrong he done. An' to make sure you so do, the court will accompany you an' wield a guidin' hand during your deliberations."

"You can't do it! I object! You're crazy!" Tom Drew hollers all in one breath.

"Me too!" the Pig shouts. "What kind of a fool court is this here? Ain't you never been nowheres? I thought you-all said this was a regular court. Don't you know nothin'? That jury goes out an' deliberates alone! This here is ridiculous!" he declares, turnin' to the jury for support.

"You bet it is!" Hank snaps. "An' you take jes' one more wallop at the dignity of this court an' it becomes tragic! Lemme inform you of somethin'. This court adjourns to the warehouse with the jury. The law specific pervides that when votin' out a verdict the jury must retire from the courtroom. We're goin' to obey the law. An' I'm goin' along to see that she's obeyed."

"All right," Tommy Drew agrees. "Then I'm goin'."

"That includes me," the Pig chips in.

"No objection whatever," Hank rules. "More'n that, the court invites the spectators to accompany us. This camp is proud of its judicial establishment, an' we ain't got nothin' to conceal. Long as the jury obeys the law by retirin', there ain't no rule to keep us from goin' along."

When all hands is inside the warehouse Hank locks the door. Then the jury, assisted by both attorney's an' the spectators, groups up an' starts discussin' what they'll do with the defenant.

The only ones that don't offer no advice nor suggestions is Hank an' Tommy. Them two stands off to one side, silent, as is right an' proper.

Finally, everybody havin' expressed his opinion, the jury votes into a hat, writes the result down an' announces to Hank that they've done agreed.

Hank unlocks the door, an' we all file back into the store. Soon as we're settled, Hank reads the paper one of the jury hands him.

"You're lucky," he informs Tommy. "You sure get more'n you deserve. Listen here:

> "We, the jury in the case of Tommy Andrews an' the Countess an' Doc Hatch, finds a verdict in favor of the defendant, as follows:
>
> You marry the Countess—
> Or you donate fifty ounces of dust
> to the Misson—
> Or both.
> Time limit, six o'clock tomorrow night.
>
> THE JURY."

"This sure is a complete and fillin' verdict," Hank praises, "an' the court hereby thanks an' fires the jury. An' I want to say further that all hands is satisfied an' happy."

"Who's happy?" Tommy howls. "Don't you include me in them fool remarks or I'll forgit myself an' bust you wide open!" he whoops. "Say, you empty chucks of nothin's, what's the matter with you-all?" he demands, turnin' to the jury. "Whatever is you sizzlin' lunatics tryin' to pull off on me? Hain't I jes' told you-all about that grub? Ain't that enough? An' how in heck am I goin' to accomplish that three-way verdict?

"S'pose she won't marry me? If she don't, I gotta potlatch more'n eight hundred dollars to the Mission for them to waste a-learnin' a bunch of mangy Siwashes how to read. An' if she won't marry me an' I don't spill fifty ounces in the Mission kitty, I gotta do both.

"You're crazy! You're gettin' bughouser every minute! I jes' nacherally won't do nothin'! Whadda you mean, 'or both?' " he screeches.

"Son," says Hank, real gentle and kind, "you're all excited an' het up. You been through a considerable lot of happiness an' tribulation lately, an' that's why I won't remind you that jes' a little while ago you stated that you'd drink the dose we'd mix for you without kickin'. You're goin' to do jes' that, I know.

"But I want to call to your mind a couple of facts you've overlooked. Anybody can do wrong. Any jury can assess punishment which the law will enforce, an' any fool can serve out a sentence.

"Now, son, right here's where you're plenty fortunate. Every man on the jury that tried you has done been seasoned an' mellowed by hard knocks an' a rough trail. They're sure aged in wood an' a hundred proof—all of 'em. They sticks you with a sentence that looks like the pattern of a lace tidy on the family sofy, it's that complicated. They sure makes it hard for you—an' you got it comin'. But you're goin' through with it like you said you would, an' you're goin' to find the way your own self.

"Now listen: When you finish up with this play, you're goin' to be big winner an' more'n satisfied. That's all. All hands now adjourn to the Pioneer, where the first drink is on the Emperor of Chiny. Court's closed."

OF COURSE we lets him alone—strictly; but just the same every man in camp sees Tommy go ploddin 'over to the Countess' cabin next mornin'.

He's there maybe an hour, an' when he

comes away it don't take no medicine-man to guess that she's turned him down. The poor wampus heads straight for the Mission, crawlin' along slow an' thoughtful, like he's packin' his whole Winter's outfit on his back. It's a mortal cinch that the missionary an' them no-'count Injuns is about to annex fifty ounces of Tommy's hard-earned dust. It's mighty near too bad, but Hank an' that jury knows a thing or two.

When Tommy comes out of the Mission door the missionary is with him, an' the two of 'em points straight for the Countess' teepee. They're in there maybe an hour. Then Tommy, the missionary an' the Countess comes out an' mushes over to the store. Right away all hands does the same.

It's amazin' how everybody has got to hurry out to buy somethin' they don't need an' never thought of before.

O'MEMBER me sayin', a while back, that 'most everybody gets a even break purty near all the time? Well, listen:

Soon as all hands is inside the store, the missionary gets up on the counter an' makes a wah-wah.

"My friends," he says, smilin', "Mr. Andrews has jes' presented to our cause the sum of fifty ounces. In the name of our little Mission I thanks him—an' you. Mr. Andrews explains to me his reason for this generous gift, but I thanks him jes' the same. Fifty ounces is fifty ounces. Moreover, I understands fully all the other reasons that leads up to this donation.

"Now, my friends, it's my job to lend a helpin' hand whenever I gets a chance. An' believe me, gentlemen, this here is a lulu of a opportunity. Understandin' that Mr. Andrews' sole an' only reason for reniggin' on his promise to this lady was her inability to—er—prepare food accordin' to his superstition an' beliefs, I suggested that he, Mr. Andrews, engage the services of Maggie By-an'-by, a most estimable Injun girl who has been reared in our Mission an' who is a first-class cook, American plan. I am pleased to say that my suggestion was adopted an' carried out. After which we calls on the Countess, an' Mr. Andrews, assisted by me, renews his suit.

"I frankly tells the lady that there can be no further trouble about fodder as Miss By-an'-by is a grub-preparin' marvel. After listenin' to the proper amount of pleadin' this splendid lady has done agreed to the *status quo ante bellum*, an' our little party is now here to finish the job.

"That's all—except that before I ties these two lovin' hearts together I makes a potlatch.

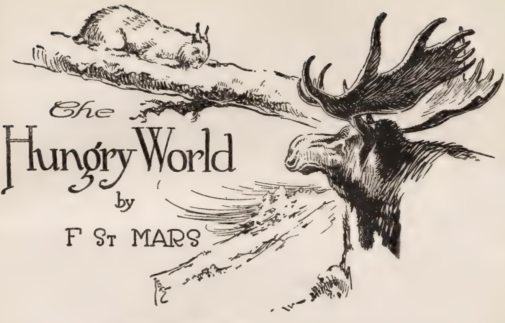
"Not feelin' inclined to retain any money presented to me under undue pressure, I hereby hands the Countess these fifty ounces as a weddin' present from the Mission an' the camp. An' eight hundred dollars is eight hundred dollars."

Then he marries 'em.

The Hungry World

by

F St Mars



Author of "The Swordsman," "The Green Devil," etc.

THERE could be no doubt about it any longer—the boy must go. He ought to have been driven forth before. Possibly if the father had foreseen this hour he would have killed this, the biggest of all his sons, at birth. Now, however, the hunting was getting worse and worse from day to day; traveling was becoming more difficult; the wolves were taking most of the game, and the birds of prey the rest, it seemed.

There was scarce food to be found for himself, and, perhaps, the mother, whose hunting-grounds lay to the eastward, and there was no more room in that part of the world for the boy at all.

But the boy was full grown—there was the rub; and from what his father had learned of him not one given to obeying his commands readily.

The boy, be it mentioned, was a long, sinuous shape, muffled to the eyes in most exquisite soft fur, crouched upon a snow-laden bough above. He was a European lynx really; but he looked, with his cynical mask fixed in a set grin, more like a fiend.

He was mostly long, furry legs, and huge, padded feet; thirty-nine inches was his length—not counting an idiotic bob-tail of eight inches; isabellin gray was his color; inscrutable were his green-yellow cat's eyes; and diabolically cruel was his bearded face. For the rest, he was a feline of the felines; furtive, silent, and mysterious. Obviously, such a beast was not lightly to be, so to speak, shown the door.

Then the domestic argument began, and a traveler, had there been one so unfortunate, passing through the snowed-up silence of the forest at that moment, would have imagined that all the fiends in —— inhabited it. Indeed, the yells, groans and spittings were beyond description of any pen. One would have said that at the least a dozen furies were doing one another to death brutally.

As a matter of fact, the father was only bounding to a bough, rebounding to another, and turning up at last, pressed flat, upon the bough upon which, farther along, his big son crouched.

The noises represented simply the two trying to frighten each other; for the cat, from the lion down, is a strategist of the first water, and, though no coward, will seldom fight till all other methods of gaining victory have been exhausted.

At last slowly they sank till the snow seemed almost to swallow them. Then they sprang, and the son passed clean over his father, striking wickedly down in mid-air.

They landed, and were instantly at each

other again. Then over they rolled, fighting like demons, the son undermost. It looked now like a snow grave for him; but he roweled with his hind claws and with all the power of his long hind legs.

From this devil's clinch the two of them rebounded ten seconds later—clearing themselves as cats alone can—rather redder than when they went into it.

The son had a hole in his shoulder—a red stream down his right forepaw staining the perfect purity of the snow—and a gash over the left eye. His father had a clean scarlet gridiron on his right flank, a tear on the left hind leg, and a crimson belly. Neither looked exactly like show pussies, so to speak.

For two minutes those sinister, secret ones of the wild glared at one another, never moving a muscle. And during that time they worked out two facts in their subtle feline brains. Firstly, they had fought to live. Secondly, they must surely die if they fought longer, for they were too well matched for any other decision.

Then the son imperceptibly took a step back and finally off, insolent, deliberate, and intractable. He had gone at last—driven from home to fend for himself.

Half an hour later and about a quarter of a mile away eastward, a bull moose—they called him elk in that land—straddling and bending down a sapling for the browsing of his supper, turned his gigantic-antlered head suddenly, and stared with little, keen eyes at the rigid, fading perspective of trees around him.

He saw nothing, and he heard nothing. Yet, being a wild creature, he felt that he was not alone any longer. His instinct whispered that he was being watched; and, be it mentioned, he who in the wild watches Citizen Bull Moose at close quarters does so with his life in pawn.

Still, such was the watcher's skill in woodcraft that it is doubtful whether the bull moose, suddenly leaving his meal and advancing with a threatening swing of his five-foot antlers, would ever have found him if a raven, black as a wicked thought, flapping above the tree-tops on some rogue's errand or other, had not come to help him, and, settling, barked down vile language at the young lynx, belly flat and rigid, behind a tree-stump.

Not until the moose, his hoofs clicking like castanets as he strode high in the snow, was almost towering over him, did the lynx move a hair. Then he went straight up the nearest tree as if he had been shot there, and the raven shifted out of that tree as if his life depended upon his quickness in quitting, which, knowing the lynx, it possibly did.

Nothing puts the cat folk into a more evil temper than the ceaseless efforts of all the bird people to advertise their vicinity, and so annul their best-laid plans for concealment. Cats simply loathe being shown up, and the bird folk spend a great deal of their time in showing them up.

The moose stood towering against the tree-trunk, staring up at him. The lynx, himself flat along a horizontal bough, glared down at the moose.

Then suddenly his attention was diverted. Quick as thought, his baleful glance had shifted, and he was staring into the branches. Something had moved there, something that his sinister presence had made move. A little lump of snow fell with a soft sigh. Another, higher up. It was invisible, that something. It was a wild creature, which was keeping the trunk between it and the lynx as it climbed.

Presently came a little commotion. It seemed as if some wandering eddy of wind had sprung up, stirring the branches, causing little lumps of snow to fall from several places at once. But there was no wind.

The climber, whoever he was, must have caused that tiny commotion, for he stopped, and the lumps of snow ceased to fall.

There followed a pause, during which the lynx remained still as a beast run into a mold—all part and parcel of the bough he was on.

Then the climber began his invisible upward course again, and the commotion was redoubled, but albeit most stealthily.

Then the lynx saw, and, seeing, understood.

It seemed as if some bird, till then invisible, had silently left the top of the tree and sailed on a descending slant to the next, where upon arrival it vanished as suddenly as it had taken shape. Another followed. A third glided to another tree. A fourth shot from branch to branch of the tree he was on. Each as soon as it landed went out, so to speak, with the same mysterious suddenness with which it had come into being. None of them made a sound.

They just appeared, trapezed across the sky, and vanished—utterly, like ghosts.

Impossible almost, in the dim snow-haze, to say what they were, if one did not know. But the lynx knew. They were squirrels. Quite by chance he had happened in the midst of a band of squirrels migrating in search of food.

But the invisible climber? Who was he? He was certainly death, or the squirrels would not have "broken their freeze" before him in that fashion, and given themselves away to the lynx.

But what death? There were many in that forest, all cruel, all mysterious and nearly all hidden. The fact that he had gone up, however, and not "frozen" or gone down, suggested that he was at least a lesser death than the lynx.

Upon that deduction the lynx acted.

HE DID not so much move along that branch as coax himself to the tree-bole. He peered cautiously round, staring upward, and he surprized the climber at its climbing. It was a long, sinuous, exquisitely coated sable. It was following the squirrels upon their migration, for upon them it lived.

Possibly they had not known that it existed till the lynx, himself unknowing, had surprised it at its stalking; just as the raven and the bull moose had surprized the lynx at his. Neither party concerned looked pleased; the squirrels, being the most likely to suffer, looking least pleased of all.

Then the lynx acted. It was characteristic of him, possibly of all cats, that he delivered his ultimatum suddenly. Surprize was the essence of his tactics. He shot straight up the tree-bole at that sable like a living gray bolt—with one clean, cleaving spring.

In the same instant the bull moose snorted—nay, almost whistled—while a big capercaillie three feet long, and sending all his seventeen pounds' weight along with every ounce of power in his big wings, hurtled above their heads.

The effect of these two things, upon the lynx especially, was extraordinary. He heard them after he started his spring, and he changed his mind. He seemed to twist his whole body in midair, with a wrench that was visible, and he came down again upon the very spot that he had started from, like some great india-rubber ball.

He was just in time to hear a fox bark a sudden, gutteral warning, to see the sloping hindquarters and spreading, palmated antlers of the moose fade swiftly into the pigeon-blue-gray haze between the ranked tree-boles, and to note that squirrels and sable alike had dissolved themselves, as if by magic, into nowhere.

He rebounded, almost without touching it, from the bough he had returned to, full ten feet down to the ground, and then went over the snow as hard as he could go, leaping enormously.

A wolf came by, going like the wind, and a white hare passed also. Both were obviously pressed for time, and took no notice of each other.

Some disturbance back behind made the lynx glance over his shoulder as he bounded from some death unknown which the action of the other wild folk told him was greater than he; and what he saw sent him up the next tree. Three dogs were coming through the forest, and dogs, he knew, spelled man somewhere behind them.

The dogs ran straight to the tree the lynx had just left, and stopped. Then they began to bay furiously, and their voices rang through the forest.

They knew their job, those dogs. They had bayed the sable; his skin was money. So did the lynx know his job; his skin was money, too. He had become part of the tree he was on apparently. He seemed to have melted into the lines of the wood.

Anon, to the dogs added itself the figure of a man on a horse, galloping. He came with the dusk in a raw, red light, subdued and churchlike among the trees. He dismounted and looked up the tree the sable was on. Then he led his horse some distance away, returned, did something—magic, for all the lynx knew, as he watched with eyes that burned a faint green light—in a circle which included both trees, called the dogs off, retired among the tree-trunks, and—faded into the dusk. He had gone, presumably, without doing anything.

The lynx waited half an hour, while the forest remained as silent and lifeless as mid-ocean, and he concluded that that man presumably had not gone. Otherwise, why did the giant eagle-owl in the next tree keep up a soft and very, very faint "Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!" to warn his mate, who must be somewhere about?

And why, as the moon and the night added themselves to the biting cold, did no less than three white ghosts of wood hares, stealing up along their own packed and trodden snow-paths, stop suddenly, sit like stone carvings, and steal away again? The hares could certainly not smell him, the lynx, or the sable. There must be some reason behind it all.

At last the lynx's quick eyes—burning now dully in the night—marked the sable's lithe form slowly, stealthily coming down. He was descending to follow his squirrels. The man, by the way, had searched for the squirrel-trail first, guessing he would find a sable somewhere in attendance. He obviously could not stay there all night; and so thought the lynx. He, too, was beginning to know the meaning of the word "hunger." It was long since he had fed.

Moreover, what seemed safe enough for the sable might be safe enough for him.

He wanted to get away from that vicinity badly. There was something wrong with it; the eagle-owl was saying so in little above a whisper, and all the wild knows that the eagle-owl is a very wise bird.

Cats have a way of arriving in places without seeming to have got there, lynxes especially, which is why the lynx was visible—if a gray shadow can be called visible—leaping away in his grotesque fashion, bobbing among the trees.

The sable was doing the same in the opposite direction—probably unaware of the lynx—but more gracefully, rippling along with consummate ease.

Then they stopped.

It was a most extraordinary happening—just for all the world as if they had run each into a brick wall. And in the same moment the whole of that silence rang with bells.

The two of them had not, of course, run into any wall. They had run into a stout net, hung with bells, which the hunter had placed round the trees to entangle the sable when he chose to come down; sables being far too valuable merely to shoot or trap; they must be taken unsoiled.

The sable went mad, twisting himself up hopelessly in the clinging horror he could not see.

The lynx went ten times mad, bouncing about like some huge firework that had gone off prematurely and was spitting and exploding in momentary expectation of blowing up utterly.

Naturally the man and the dogs came back at the gallop. The bells had called them from where they were waiting near by. But only one dog spotted and went for the lynx. He, that great cat, had not been set down in the program.

Nor had the net been made to hold insane lynxes. It did not hold him long. The dog arrived just in time to see him break away, bounding and capering crazily over the snow, more or less wrapped up in such part of the netting as had parted. He looked like some dancing devil of the snow and the night, cavorting in derision in the face of the moon.

Promptly that dog interviewed him for five and a quarter seconds by the clock. The man wondered what had happened, and he left off securing the sable to grab and cock his rifle. It was certainly a most unearthly yell. It came from the dog, but it might have come from anything on or under the earth.

The lynx said nothing. He just went away, bounding tremendously, bits of torn netting flapping behind him like pennons, and frightening him nearly into a fit. The dog did not go with him, or anywhere else. It had gone already into the next world, in fact, and the man found it lying, bitten and clawed to death, upon the snow.

No beasts on earth perhaps can beat the cat tribe in the matter of speed—for the first few hundred yards certainly; but they are sprinters, not stayers, and need time to get their second wind.

The lynx, with his bounding gait, covered the first few hundred yards also at a speed that left the other dogs behind. Then he stopped to glare back, his thin, tufted ears folded down, his whole expression literally fiendish, and to shake his paws, cat fashion, to rid himself of the incubus of the net.

But suddenly he half-turned his head, quivered, and seemed like a stone. It was evident that he was listening to some other sound besides the barking of the dogs; some other sound which possibly he alone could hear.

Then, as if Fear himself rode him, that lynx ceased to exist in that place; and half an hour later, traveling always eastward, he stopped dead.

Something in a hurry was approaching him—something leaping high along in great, grotesque leaps, with eyes aflame and jaws agape. It was upon him in an instant, almost colliding with him. It erupted a volley of snarls, shot into the air and to one side, striking, with claws hooked and cruel, almost as swiftly as he dodged, and rocketed from sight up a tree.

He had just time to give vent to a shriek, which sounded appalling, but was the lynx way of shouting, "Friend!"—just time to notice that the climber was a female lynx, when the moonlit dark all about him filled with hurrying shadows, and with eyes, like green fairy-lamps, in pairs. Just time had he to note these things and to leap for his life.

Few beasts but a lynx perhaps could have taken that leap, and fewer still could have got to the end of it—alive.

He was conscious only dimly as he whirled through the icy air of a rush, of the clashing of jaws that gleamed, of eyes that shone, leaping up at him, of ringing muzzles all but brushing his tucked-up hind legs, and of a confused medley of snarls and the hustle of bodies.

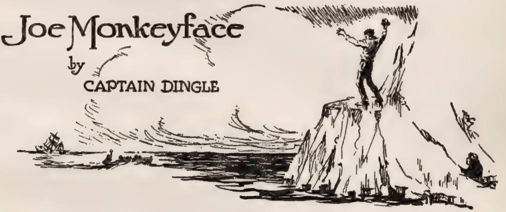
Then he landed upon the tree, spun upon himself, to slash at a sharp, wet snout leaping up and breathing hotly almost in his face, bounded upward again, and stopped to look down upon the heaving flanks, waving tails, and steaming, sharp snouts of the baffled wolf-pack below.

For a long forty seconds he regarded them, then turned his head slowly to stare at a form, sleek, silent, and mysterious, that had slid up, like a gray ghost, beside him. It was, though he did not know it, his half-sister, and she had just been driven out of her home by their mother, whom she also had fought, and so, being wounded, had drawn unto herself the famishing wolf-pack on her blood trail.

And after that—well, what did even a wolf-pack matter after that in the face of the great little god, Love? The former could not climb, and were at full liberty to go anywhere they liked. Both lynxes bent down insolently and told them so in choice lynx language. One could have heard them do it half a mile away. And the giant eagle-owl, passing swiftly and silently over their heads at that moment, laughed "Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!" as if he understood, which perhaps he did.

Joe Monkeyface

by CAPTAIN DINGLE



Author of "Tides of Hate," "The Burial of Billy," etc.

THE shipping-master looked up from his papers wearily, for the crew he had just signed on had topped all records for helpless, hopeless imbecility.

"That's the lot, captain," he said, blotting the last entry.

"Hold on; one more, sir."

Captain Deshay peered over the heads of his shuffling mob.

"Here, you!" he called, beckoning toward the remotest corner of the room.

"The boy," he remarked as the official took up his pen.

A gangling youth, of age absolutely unguessable and appearance beyond describing, shambled forward with the aspect of a terrifically beaten cur.

"Stand up, lad, stand up! What's scaring you?" the skipper tried to soothe him. "Up with your head and stick out your chest like a he man, can't you?"

"Yes, sir," whined the youth, and hung his head lower.

"Joe Monkeyface," copyright 1922, by A. E. Dingle.

"What's your name?" snapped the impatient official.

The lad hesitated, stammering wordlessly.

"Come, your name, man!"

"Joe—Joe—Joe Monkeyface, sir, and I'll dance if you won't hit me, sir!"

The wretched travesty on humanity shuffled clumsily with his feet, whimpering fearfully. In the crowd of boozy outward-bounders, impatient to get their advance notes and embark upon a final cruise of the knocking-shops, a drunken guffaw burst forth, stopped sharply by Captain Deshay.

"Last ship?" asked the official.

Joe Monkeyface shivered, but answered nothing.

"Don't worry him, sir," said the skipper gently. "Just sign him on. Shilling a month. I'm taking him for a hobby. Never been afloat before. I'm going to find out what story lies behind that whipped-dog appearance. Ever see anything like him? I never did."

"Wasting your time, cap'n," returned the official crisply, and began to clear his desk.

The crew passed out, and Captain Deshay took Joe Monkeyface and fed him, bought a few clothes for him, and put him in a secure place until he could take him to the ship when his own business was completed.

WHEN the *Miltiades* warped out of the East India Docks, bound for Melbourne, it was the dockers and riggers who hauled the lines and passed the tow-rope. Riggers set topsails and head-sails before leaving in the tug, and the ship was left to bucket and wallow under short canvas in the chop and churn of the Nore until her sweating officers could hammer animation into the human hogs in the forecastle.

Through all the chaos of a night-tide sailing, a cringing, whimpering figure fled from side to side and end to end of the vague expanse of rope-tangled deck, dodging every moving man as if expecting a blow. It was the newly promoted second mate who at last tucked Joe Monkeyface snugly out of harm's way in the potato locker.

Mr. Earl was of a sunny nature ordinarily. The pride of his first responsibility as a watch officer, plus the surge of high pulsing, healthy blood in his arteries, sufficed to keep him elated and cheery even in the midst of such a limbing and laming job as that night sailing proved, and still retain sufficient human kindliness to see the helplessness of Joe.

"Don't hit me, sir!" whined Joe, and as if forced by long custom his feet began to shuffle on the planks.

"Hit you?" laughed Earl. "Lord love you, sonny, I couldn't hit a ball with a bat just now, I feel so fine. Hop in here, lad. No place for the like of you on deck."

With the mate to assist the spanker was hauled out next, and the captain himself held the wheel.

"All right," the skipper said when Earl would have taken the wheel, the spanker sheets belayed. "Carry on, you two, and try to rouse out that bunch of drunks. Where's the lad?"

"In the spud-locker, sir," grinned Earl, uncertain how his custodianship would be received.

"Skulking?"

"No, sir. I shoved him in there to get him out of the way. Looked like getting hung in the bight of a rope, sir."

"H'm! Best thing you could do," grunted Captain Deshay. "As you come aft from the fo'csle, bring the lad along. I want to give him a talking to before turning him adrift among the wolves for'ard."

Whatever the nature of the talk was, Joe Monkeyface entered the forecastle of the *Miltiades* with at least a show of manhood. It was four o'clock in the morning before watches were picked and half the men sent below, so that Joe, who was a day man, and had all night in—when he was lucky—encountered none of his mates except as tangible blots on the darkness until he was turned-to at four bells to join the clean-up and wash-down party on deck.

Then, after swallowing a pannikin of scalding beverage which the ship's stores list misnamed coffee, but which was pure nectar to him, Joe stepped out to his first encounter with the realities of the sea, and into the arms of a broom-laden able seaman who abruptly dropped his brooms and clapped his hand to his thigh with a crack like a pistol-shot. It was the seaman who had uttered that appreciative guffaw in the shipping-office at hearing Joe's given name.

"Hully sailor! Here's the monk, lads!" he roared, and then crouched before Joe, whose terrors had all resurged upon him.

"Dance, blast yuh, dance!"

Like an automaton Joe shuffled his feet, his hang-dog face turned fearfully toward the seaman. There was a certain rhythm in his shufflings, but also a decided suggestion of numbing terror which made his movements sheerly automatic.

"Dance, yuh funny-faced cowson!" swore the seaman, known as Cardiff, and raised his heavy hand over the cringing performer.

Joe whined, and shuffled faster, but his lips drew back from his teeth in a snarl, the snarl of a beaten cur when further beating is threatened.

"Drop that, Cardiff!"

The second mate burst in among the grinning watch and seized Joe's arm.

"You didn't ship to amuse a crowd of sojering toughs, my lad," he said kindly. "Cardiff, pick up that gear and start the head-pump. Have no more of this funny business, or I'll see what I can find you to do in your watch below for a spell. Come with me, Monkeyface."

Joe was put to work on the poop brasswork, and gradually he assumed an aspect of comparative security, though as the watch scrubbed their way aft, and their rough talk and laughter was heard clearly, he would start and polish faster as if he dreaded to be caught short of his work and beaten again.

Mr. Earl watched him closely, pacing the weather side of the poop and passing Joe every few moments, and as he took in, feature by feature, the details of that strangely unhandsome face and that bowed, cowering figure that should have been full of youthful buoyancy and sprightliness, he marveled, as Captain Deshay had marveled, what story lay back of it all. The watch had finished scrubbing the maindeck and were dragging their gear on to the poop, when he stopped them.

"That'll do," he said. "Leave the poop this morning. Get the running-gear in shape, bosun, and make fast all boats and gear."

To Joe Monkeyface he added, leading the way—

"Come along the monkey-bridge, Joe, and clean the standard binnacle."

Safely beyond overhearing by the helmsman, the second mate suddenly asked—

"What's your real name?"

"Joe Monkeyface, sir. Don't hit me, sir; I'll dance."

A curious spasm passed over the officer's face, and he stared intently at the pitiful figure. Joe's expression might well have baffled an older, wiser man than Earl, for it was to outward appearance a composite image of ape-like bestiality, inhuman cunning, and whimpering submission. The thin snarl at the lips might be anything from stark cruelty to agonized apprehension.

"Don't speak of hitting," Mr. Earl returned shortly; "and I don't want you to dance. Listen, my lad: You had another name once, didn't you? What was it?"

"Joe—Joe Monkey——"

He stopped as he caught the second mate's eye.

"I never heard no other name, sir," he whined.

Joe's lips drew back farther, revealing broken, discolored teeth that had never known a brush, and Mr. Earl experienced a sensation of revulsion that routed his pity. The rout was made utter when the curt voice of Captain Deshay rang out on the poop:

"Mr. Earl! Come to yer duty, sir!"

And when officer and captain met, the commander's face was dark with passion.

"Mr. Earl," he said, "you'll leave that lad alone, if ye please. I'll let no man bait him——"

"I was only—" stammered Earl, conscious of his good intentions.

"I saw what ye were doing. The lad's suffered enough. He'll suffer more with the crowd o' barbarians we have for'ard. I'll not let the after-guard practise on him. Remember that, now."

SUNRISE after sunrise followed the *Miltiades* out of the channel, and into the emptiness of the sailing routes of the Atlantic. What each sunrise meant to Joe Monkeyface only he and his Creator knew. When Cardiff chose to hammer the lad, sending him on deck to face the second mate with his snarling grin painfully accentuated by cut lips, Mr. Earl chose to ignore his hurts; for his own hurts were sore yet, and would be for a long time, after what the captain had told him.

And yet Joe Monkeyface was not wholly the whipped cur he appeared. There was a morning, a dead, stinking morning, when sea and sky had died and rotted from lack of wind and the ship beat her heart out on the slimy hillocks of blindingly glassy wastes. Yards braced as tightly as wire would hold them, and every bit of canvas furled to save it from whipping itself to threads, it was a hot, reeking horror for the "doctor" inside the galley.

Joe passed along with the kids for breakfast and reached the open door at a moment when the cook, lifting a heavy pot of burgoo from the stove, slipped in the grease of the floor and fell. He grappled for the nearest hold as the scalding porridge nipped his almost naked flesh, and brought down in his fall a boiler of boiling salt water waiting for the immersion of the salt horse for the noon dinner of the other watch.

The doctor's yells were lusty enough to bring every man within reach stampeding to the door. That they hoped to find him weltering in his dying gore perhaps accounted for their alacrity; for ship's cook never went to sea in windjammers whose life was not greatly desired by the majority of the rabble he had to cook for.

But Joe dropped his mess-kids with a crash, burst in through the door, and, heedless of the searing, scalding mixture that bit at his ankles, dragged out the cook and dropped him on deck. When the watch gathered around, Joe was standing shivering with fear, mess-kids in hand, gazing down at the spilled and spoiled burgoo that was to have filled his dishes. Then he abruptly tumbled to the deck, his scalded feet refusing longer to sustain him, and by his fall escaped the terrific wallop aimed at his head by Cardiff, furious at the delay with his food.

"Can't understand that boy at all," growled the captain as he rummaged in the medicine-chest for unguents and bandages.

"I can, I think sir," returned Mr. Earl. "Take a close look at his face, and you'll find that what you take to be pitiful is simply currish meanness. I——"

"Why, confound you!" Captain Deshay stormed, glaring up at Earl. "You dare speak like that of a lad who's game enough to go into boiling water for a greasy doctor? I'll, I'll—, sir——"

The abashed second mate muttered an apology and took himself off on deck. He had only heard of the cook's mishap, and now he was to find himself faced with an amazing turn of events that must sway his own feelings back again, for he greatly loved a brave man.

As Joe's injuries slowly healed it was Mr. Earl who made up in little kindnesses for those days when he had allowed his misjudgment of the lad to influence his treatment. When able to carry on with his work again Joe had recovered vastly from his earlier terrors, and the second mate took a keener interest than even the captain seemed to; and when one breezy afternoon Joe went overboard without hesitation to save the mangy ship's cat Mr. Earl cast out of mind any lingering doubt and set to work to dig for the soul of the unlovely waif.

That daring plunge into the sea, besides causing a call for all hands to heave the ship to and lower away a boat, showed that there were some things at least incapable of bringing the glare of terror into the eyes of Joe Monkeyface. Not even when the ship was sailing on, before heaving to, leaving him astern in mid-sea with a clawing, spitting yellow fury in one hand, did the lad's face show fear; rather the ugly features were illuminated almost to beauty by a sort of high courage that compared grotesquely with his usual expression.

"What ever made you so scared of a beating, Joe?" the second mate asked one dog-watch.

Joe was laboriously poring over a compass card given him to study by the skipper; and to keep himself clear of ribald interruption from the men, he was seated on the poop bucket-rack. At the question the lurking fear again crept into the lad's face, and he shivered.

"You're plucky enough in other things," pursued Mr. Earl. "You're getting hard as nails, too. Why don't you set about some of the brutes who keep after you?"

Joe Monkeyface shivered more painfully and made no reply. The compass card dropped from his shaking fingers, and Mr. Earl picked it up and handed it to him. He tried another tack.

"Tell me how you got that queer name, Joe."

The officer's tone was kindly, and the softly spoken words seemed to soothe some of Joe's fears. He shot a swift glance upward at Mr. Earl's face, then lowered his head and said dully:

"I never knowed no different name, sir. Ain't it a good 'un for the likes o' me?"

Suddenly he raised his head again and presented a full view of his beetle-browed ugliness. In spite of his kindliness the second mate smiled as the truth of Joe's remark went home.

"I don't think you can help your face, Joe. Anyhow that name was never given to you in kindness. Can't you remember any of your kid days? Don't you remember any father, or mother?"

"Me father was 'ung, sir. Me mother, I dunno if she was me mother. She used to drag me around to the sojers' barracks—dunno what she went there for—and the sojers used to call me Monkeyface, and she'd laugh and tell me to dance for the pretty gents. Then they'd give me pennies, and she'd buy gin with 'em. So I wouldn't dance once, and she beat me. She got locked up after that for drunk an' disorderly, so I kept on goin' round dancin'. But I never got no pennies, 'cause she wasn't there—only plenty o' beatin's."

Joe shuddered sharply at the memory, and went on repeating his compass points with painful perseverance. Mr. Earl watched him narrowly, saw the healthy tan of the sunny salt air and noted the supple turn of back and shoulders which even the grimy rag of a shirt could not entirely conceal, then laughed as he contrasted Joe's plucky rescue of the cook, and his dive for a mangy cat, with his whipped-dog aspect when fear of physical beating obsessed him. He wondered now how he ever mistook the pitiful expression of the lad for inherent or acquired meanness, and suddenly resolved to take upon himself what he conceived to be Captain Deshay's intention, the development of this waif of the city streets.

"Listen, Joe," he said, "when the men have hammered you, didn't you ever hit back?"

"No, sir."

The old whining note crept back into Joe's voice. His small eyes shone like a cornered cat's.

"Shake yourself together, man!" snapped Earl. "Listen. I want you to be a he-man, Joe. I'll stand by you. Next time Cardiff or anybody else wallops you, just fly at his face like a blooming wildcat and hammer him with feet, fists, teeth, anything, until he drops or quits.

"Understand? It's not the sort of scrapping a man likes, but you've got to make a beginning, Joe, and I want you just once to see a man drop under your hands. That'll give you a whale of a lot of pluck, and next time perhaps you'll be able to quit using your teeth, and later on your feet. But first of all get the winning habit. That's all you want. Will you do it? If you don't, you'll be a whipped dog all your life."

"Yes, sir," Joe replied huskily; but his face went livid and out from it pallor stood three dark seams, on either cheek-bone and across the low brow, which caused Mr. Earl to catch him by the shoulders and turn his face around to the sun.

He peered hard at the dark lines, and cursed fervidly.

"Holy sailor! So that's why you look so crooked about the face, is it? Who ever beat you like that, Joe?"

"Me father, sir, when I was a kid, becos I spilled a drop o' beer I was fetchin' for 'im, sir."

Mr. Earl was shocked. No wonder, he thought, the poor devil was called Monkeyface; but Nature never gave him such warped features. No wonder, either, that the lad cringed at thought of a blow upon that battered face.

"H'm! Well, Joe, nobody's going to repeat anything like this. Your bones were soft then. Anyhow if you don't take one chance pretty soon you're going to smell —— for'ard there; and the worst part of the passage is yet to come. Hit back, lad, hit back."

JOE MONKEYFACE hit back. Cardiff cuffed him on general principles as he passed, and in a second was encumbered with a panting, clawing, glaring horror that clung with its legs and tore with teeth and nails.

Cardiff was no chicken-hearted tough. he was a bully, but a courageous bully, and when he got his breath back he set to work to pound Joe off. It was not until the fighting pair had torn through the crowd of amazed seamen like a cyclone, and Joe's back was almost broken against the samson-post, that Cardiff shook him off and finally dropped him with a half-hearted punch in the face.

With the blow, weak though it was, Joe's fighting essay terminated; he fell away whimpering, all his glorious frenzy gone from him. But it was noticeable that Cardiff didn't follow up his advantages; and it was remarked during the days that followed that Cardiff refrained from baiting the lad and regarded him furtively with a sort of nervous uncertainty as if not at all sure that the next encounter would be as easily won.

As for Joe, he seemed unaware that he had scored a partial victory. The memory of that blow in the face lingered, and Mr. Earl despaired of ever inducing a second attempt at retaliation. Joe appeared not to notice that he was left alone; but he saw readily enough that he had displeased the second mate, and even the captain looked at him queerly.

"Better let him sail his own traverse, sir," Earl told the captain. "The men don't seem so eager to pass him a wallop since he chawed Cardiff's ear half off, and maybe he'll find himself as time goes on and he isn't hammered so often."

"I believe you're right," Captain Deshay rejoined. "The lad's been too badly scared to easily shake it off. How's he getting on with his work?"

"Slowly, sir. He keeps what he gets, but it takes him a long time to get it. Hasn't mastered the compass card yet, though he knows a lot of the ropes. Seems that he wants concrete examples for everything he's told. Put him on a rope and tell him the name, and he remembers it; but point out something out of reach and he can't seem to get it. I pointed out the catharpins to him yesterday, and he don't know them from the catheads today."

Captain Deshay walked the poop for a while in silence, glancing around the bright horizon, sniffing keenly at the sharp air. The bells were struck, a man passed to relieve the wheel, and he wore a muffler. The skipper smiled.

"Mr. Earl, when that sort of shell-back wears a muffler to the wheel, he'll wear mittens tomorrow, and shoes the next day, and it's a sure sign the ship's creeping south. I thought I smelled ice. Send the lad along at eight bells and I'll find him some warmer togs. How's the shaky fore-royal-mast holding?"

"Got a preventer backstay up first thing this watch, sir. It seems stiff enough."

"All right. Watch it, and keep a sharp lookout."

SOON the crew of the *Miltiades* were too busy to think of bothering Joe Monkeyface. Captain Deshay was noted for quick passages, and this was to be no exception. Sailing far south, as near to a full great circle as the Crozets and Kerguelen Land would allow, winds were strong, seas high, and ice frequent. Double handed wheels, constant look-out, wet quarters and decks too often swept for any work other than sheltered work to be done, men had no time for idle horseplay; that is a resource for the lazy tropic weeks, when warm sun and full fare make hot blood and devilment.

But the chill bitterness of the incessant cold and wet frightened Joe, and the skipper saw it. He put the lad in the galley to help the cook. The warmth and comparative dryness soon put renewed confidence into Joe; and very quickly the doctor, whose memory for services rendered was weak, put most of the work upon him, forgetting or ignoring the fact that Joe had saved him from very serious hurts.

Joe's initial awkwardness was not helped or lessened either by friendly advice or by the giddy gymnastics of the ship running before the howling westerlies. He dropped the joint for the cabin dinner one noon, smashing the skipper's favorite gravy-channeled dish and all but spoiling the beef on the filthy deck.

Joe was sore enough, for he knew the skipper was his friend and knew that the damage would annoy him; but the cockney cook gained nothing by rubbing it in. The doctor appeared at the forecastle door while the watch were at dinner, reeking with unspeakable muck.

"Hullo, Slushy, wot's up?" piped a young A. B., edging farther away. "Some'at dropped——"

"Dropped?" squealed the doctor, dancing with rage and showering all hands with grease of the vilest. " 'Oo told you anyfink wos dropped? —— bli'me! That bleedin' Joe Monkeyface goes an' 'e drops the skipper's fav'rit meat dish, an' I says to 'im:

" 'Wot yer goin' to drop nah, hey? Yer've been an' smashed the Old Man's gravy dish into little bits, yer bloomin' hape. Wot next yer goin' ter drop, hey?'

" 'You,' 'e says, big as Billy be——, an' 'e ups and 'ooks me in the perishin' beak wiv 'is elber an' capsizes me into the bleedin' slush-tub.

"Where's Lamps? I want some 'ile to git some o' this muck outer me hair."

Captain Deshay heard of it through the mate just as he was considering sending for Joe to wig him for the damage. Instead of the wigging, Joe received all unconsciously the emphatic approval of at least two men who were his friends; for when the mate went on deck to let Mr. Earl get his dinner the captain was still at the table, and together they chuckled over the little incident to such a degree that improved digestion compensated both for the slight shortcomings in the dinner.

"It looks as if the lad's coming into his own in his own way," the skipper said. "I'll bet dumping the doctor into the slush-tub was an accident if the truth's known, but it's shown Joe that he can capsize a man anyhow. I'll say nothing to him about that dish; and if the doctor bellyaches to you, Mr. Earl, about Joe, you tell him to mind his eye or Joe'll pull his pluck out and fry it for him in his own fat. I don't like that cook, anyhow."

Strangely enough, Cardiff showed an abrupt change of front toward Joe after the cook's mishap. From regarding the lad with a smoldering eye, as if ever watching for a chance to down him without fear of those terribly clawing hands, Cardiff began to speak to Joe, and even offered his tobacco-plug one bitter, screaming forenoon when the weak royal-mast tottered and a preventer stay parted in a howling snow-squall.

It was killing work for three hours, and every man from captain down to Joe Monkeyface was needed. Joe found himself holding on to a rope turned about a pin for Cardiff, who was setting up the new preventer-stay waist-deep in freezing water as the seas thundered in over the rails. And though his frozen hands were jammed and bruised over and over again in the block-sheaves Joe hung on; and even Cardiff, a sterling sailor if a rank bully, found it in his heart to offer the tobacco-plug.

Joe grabbed it much as his namesake of the simian family might, nibbling at it cautiously, peering under his brows at the giver as if doubtful of its innocuous qualities. Then at Cardiff's gruff urging he bit off a quid and smiled. Joe Monkeyface actually accomplished a smile. It was a weird and a wonderful thing in truth, that smile; it contorted the lad's grotesquely ugly face into the semblance of a gargoyle; but it was a smile, a genuine smile, and it awed Cardiff into suspicious silence. As soon as he could, the seaman gently relieved Joe of the marlinspike he was holding; then, and not until then, did he breathe freely and return Joe's smile.

But Cardiff was a bully born, and he simply had to have a butt to worry. He turned around after that morning's experience, and badgered the cockney cook until that worthy's life was a cold, doleful misery.

THINGS were much at this point when the *Miltiades* sheared through thin mush ice one night, when moon and stars were hidden under a slowly falling, driftless, blinding pall of heavy snowflakes. The double lookout, one on each knight-head, stamping to keep warm, stung by flakes of snow as big as albatross down, peered through the murk from sheer instinct, hopeless of seeing anything ahead in time to avoid it. The captain and both mates were on deck; Mr. Earl on the fore-yard, adding his youthful eyesight plus youthful keenness of enthusiasm, to the other more automatic watchfulness of the lookouts.

"Can't ye see anything, foreyard?" shouted Captain Deshay, anxious and irritable from long vigil.

"Nothing, sir," replied the second mate.

Back like a shot came the echoed query and reply. Like a cannon-shot came the impact of the jib-boom, driven by a moving force of two thousand tons, and in the next instant all head-gear buckled inboard with a crash, the iron bows crumpled and a spire of solid ice, one hundred feet high, tottered and crashed down in an avalanche of colossal splinters, some of which increased the damage on the forecastle, most of which clattered down upon its own base and sent the thunder of rolling ice broadcast over the sea.

"Swing out the boats!" shouted the skipper, running forward. "Where's Mr. Earl? Good ——, did ye not see Mr. Earl?"

The fore-royal-mast, long weakened by heavy rolling, had fallen on the first impact, but only the frail royal-mast quite fell. The topmast stood, hanging over the listed side perilously; and Mr. Earl, flung from his perch, swayed out over the white void on a running rope which swiftly rendered through the sheaves, dropping every instant between the wounded ship and the nebulous monster which held the potential doom of a stricken iceberg.

Men cut and hammered at the boat-fasts; the mate hastily sounded the well. The berg was invisible, but vaguely distinguishable through sense of chill, and the ship sullenly seemed to be backing away from her antagonist as if determined to hide the shame of her sinking; and Mr. Earl had dropped like a plummet somewhere out there between ship and ice, clutching the rope that had failed him, with the unfastened block that had caused the rope to reeve out.

Joe Monkeyface saw it, watched his friend fall, slowly at first, with rising speed as he came lower, and stood by in a sort of dull horror at his own imagined helplessness. It was a shout, an oath in itself, from Cardiff that aroused Joe as it aroused all hands within hail, and the forecastle bully left his place at the boat-skids, bowling over men in his way, and leaped over the ship's side with a deeper, more biting curse at his mates.

"Sing out, sir! Where be ye?" Cardiff yelled as he rose from his icy dive.

"Sing out, sir! Where be ye?" rumbled back the berg in echo.

A faint answer came from the white, whirling snow wreaths, and a savage demand for louder guidance from Cardiff. Then arose a bestial, snarling scream as Joe Monkeyface realized that he was permitting another man, and such a man as Cardiff, to help the one man who had steadily remained his friend.

"Come back, Cardiff! Come back and let me!" he screamed, and plunged headlong into the unknown terrors of that white sea as the ice gave back his cry in his teeth.

There came a terrific roar from the berg as another part of it toppled; then the main mass rocked on unstable base, rolled deeply and subsided into another floating shape. Joe Monkeyface, swimming frantically, heard the shouting from the ship as the swamping sea was hurled against her by the plunging ice.

He heard faintly Cardiff's lusty curse blaspheming for some injury; heard still fainter an answering cry that must have come from the second mate; then abruptly, still blindly, swept around a corner of ice into a tiny bay in which the sea was at rest.

All sounds of the ship were hushed now; his own shivering yell came back upon him in countless voices; but the voice of Mr. Earl he heard more clearly as he clawed his way painfully up on to a ledge of cold solidity and lay panting with weariness and fear.

Joe heard voices, but chattering teeth and utterly beaten body forebade him to answer. Then he must have swooned.

The icy chill and some deep animal instinct of self-preservation awoke him quickly, and he groped against a numbing sense of being utterly lost in a white world. Then the snow stopped, leaving walls of ghostly green and a floor of sighing black water. Overhead, high overhead, hung a star-studded canopy of black, over which a small puff of fleecy cloud drifted languorously.

The crest of the berg seemed to move gently against the slow-moving clouds; then the moon sailed into the space overhead and illumined the vast ice cavern in which Joe was cast, into the semblance of a sublime cathedral with the organ of old Neptune himself playing a soft anthem of lapping seas, only to have the anthem put out of tune by the discordant *skra-aw-awk* of a wheeling mollymawk.

But Joe was concerned more nearly with the sight of two black specks clinging precariously to a finger-breadth ledge of ice on the opposite side of the ice harbor. The space was a full fifty yards across, yet he could hear the labored breathing of Cardiff as he fought stubbornly to haul Mr. Earl out of the sea far enough for him to get a finger-grip to support himself. As for the second mate, he appeared to be either dead or entirely helpless, for he hung a dead weight in Cardiff's grip, making no effort to assist his rescuer.

Joe uttered a rasping howl of encouragement and plunged once more into the freezing water. He had seen, from the better side of the hollow space, that no real handhold or foothold of any kind was to be had except where he had been cast himself. As he trudgeoned across he uttered whistling cries of apprehension that were made strange to absurdity by the chattering of his teeth and his frenzied fears for his friend. Then he saw Cardiff suddenly pitch forward, and go down to the drag of the unconscious officer.

Mouthing as a dumb man mouths, Joe reached the other side of the ice harbor and grappled for a hold upon the disappearing men. Cardiff's last expiring hold fastened on Joe and together the three went down—down—down, until Joe's lungs seemed to explode and he fought fiercely to rise, but never let go his grip upon the jacket he had first touched.

It seemed to be a full hour before his bursting lungs inhaled the delicious cold air; then Joe found that he had borne upward into the starlight both Cardiff and Mr. Earl. Without a thought save to get them out of the numbing sea, Joe Monkeyface painfully towed them over to the side where they might find secure footing.

Alone, and not too greatly alive himself, after endless toil and heartbreaking failures, the lad managed to haul both men up to safety; then, in the clearest rays of the moon, in a hush that could almost be felt, he listened at each breast for trace of life.

Cardiff was dead. He had carried on, as a bold man must, until his great, bullying heart broke and the man he would have rescued had pulled him unconsciously from his pitiful hold and drowned him. But Mr. Earl breathed, miraculously; and Joe Monkeyface sprang up, shuffled clumsily with half-frozen feet and uttered a piercing shriek of triumph that echoed and reechoed among the glittering spires of the icy cathedral like a hundred voices in chorus.

Through the rest of the night, only a few hours, Joe worked as man never worked before over a man so far gone as Mr. Earl was. Crude though his knowledge was, Joe believed in warmth, and his efforts were directed toward putting animation into the still limbs he toiled at. Arms, legs, and then chest and stomach were in turn thumped and kneaded, worked frenziedly under the glittering eyes of half-frantic Joe Monkeyface.

And just at dawn, to save himself from falling from exhaustion, Joe stood up and yelled defiance to the rising sun, dancing madly, uncouthly, to restore his waning circulation as well as to announce to the world that he had seen a flicker in his friend's eyelids.

Then the sun came up, shining through a narrow pass from the eastward ocean, warming gradually the piercing chill and bringing to the castaway the knowledge that to live he must eat, or at least drink. He propped Mr. Earl up with his own coat and staggered down to the pass, seeking for anything, but knowing of nothing he might expect to find in such a place.

As he reached one horn of the narrow pass he saw a tiny trickle of water coming down from some high pinnacle that had been touched earlier by the rising sun, and scooped up a poor half-pint in his cap. Mr. Earl drank half of it thirstily, and smiled without mirth as he handed the rest back.

"Joe," he said faintly, "you're got yourself into a fine mess, haven't you? You ought to have stayed with the ship."

"I'd ha' drowned anyhow, sir," grinned Joe, shivering violently.

"I don't think the ship would sink, Joe. She's strong, and she has a stout forward bulkhead. In any case you'll starve here, and freeze to death. Help me up, lad, and we'll see where and how we stand."

Joe guessed that any man who needed help to get up could scarcely stand at all, and said so bluntly as he started off to try to find a way up or around those glittering cliffs.

"Take my knife then," said Mr. Earl. "Might come across a seal or a bear."

Joe clambered away out of sight, and after a cruel hour's climb staggered out upon a platform immediately above and in sight of the second mate. He also found himself in full view of the great ocean; and Mr. Earl, startled by his hoarse, exultant shout, stared up to see a queer figure dancing like a madman, flinging its arms grotesquely and yelling at the top of lusty lungs.

A quarter of a mile away lay the *Miltiades* a trifle low by the head truly, but afloat, and hove-to under short sail; not fifty yards from the berg a boat pulled slowly along, every man in her scanning the ice for a break. At Joe's shout they headed into the little ice harbor, on the shores of which Mr. Earl lay in sorry straits, while Joe scampered down at peril of his neck to slobber and croon inarticulate sounds that were meant to convey to his friend the glad news that he was saved.

ON THE poop of the *Miltiades* Captain Deshay looked long and earnestly through a powerful telescope at the capering figure of Joe on the ice ledge. When Joe vanished from sight, the captain handed the glass to an apprentice with a quiet smile.

"Have to find another name for Joe," he murmured. "Scupper me if a monkey ever had such an expression of hullaballoojick joy on his face as that!"

Reverse Irish

by FREDERICK J JACKSON

Author of "The Departure of Mr. Cassidy," "Unwept, Unhonored and Unhung," etc.

MR. "SHORT-HAND" CONWAY was the possessor of a beautiful grouch, and it must be added that he was in an Arizona jail that was far from beautiful. It was the monotony of confinement that jarred upon Mr. Conway; not the jail's lack of beauty. And what the jail lacked in beauty it more than made up in the strength of steel and concrete.

The jailer also had a grouch, the said state of mind being occasioned by the fact that he had been foolish enough to while away the time by playing stud poker through the cell bars with Mr. Conway. The latter, at the beginning of this game, had been able to clink four silver dollars as his total capital. Now he had a clink and a crackle to the tune of ninety-eight units of the root of evil. The jailer was broke, and this fact was Mr. Conway's one bit of joy.

Despite his ability, and luck, in the game sometimes known as "five-card insomnia," Mr. Conway's nickname had nothing to do with cards. Some years before, in a free-for-all round of gun-play south of the border, the forefinger of his right hand had been shot away. "Three-Finger" was too common a cognomen, therefore some one had invented a new one, "Short-Hand," and the name had stuck.

And with his trigger finger gone the way of all flesh, Mr. Conway had been forced to develop another style of handling a Colt. With a file he had removed certain parts of the mechanism from his old single-action .41, and with constant practise had developed an almost uncanny skill in thumbing the hammer.

But times had changed; the day of the gunman was passing, and when in town Mr. Conway had made concession to the conventionalities by carrying his Colt inside his belt, tucked between his trousers and shirt, with the bottom of his vest concealing the butt of the weapon. There had been method and "safety-first" in this concealment; a decade-old grudge had still remained unsettled between Mr. Conway and a fire-eating gunman known as "Slaughterhouse" Flanagan.

Mr. Conway, now in his late fifties, had fallen into certain settled habits, of which one in particular is worthy of being set down. Each Monday he would partake of *one* lone drink of whisky; on Tuesdays he would indulge in two; Wednesday was worthy of three; Thursday called for four; Friday was the day of five drinks; and Saturday was celebrated by an even half-dozen. Sunday was the day of drought—and a belligerent state of mind.

And it had been on a Sunday that he had ridden into Dos Pinos, and for the first time in ten years had chanced to meet with Slaughterhouse Flanagan, who was the cock-o'-the-walk in the town, being the pet gunman of certain influential county politicians. Flanagan had failed to recognize his ancient enemy—a fatal error. Sunday in Dos Pinos was invariably a slow day, and Mr. Flanagan had attempted to speed it up by taking advantage of Mr. Conway's mild and inoffensive appearance.

Mr. Conway's reply had been short, extremely profane and highly insulting. Thereupon Mr. Flanagan had rashly reached for his Colt. His hand had closed

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simultaneously upon the butt of the gun and sudden death, for Mr. Conway's old .41 had been the first to bark.

Following this episode, with full, and misplaced, confidence that the ethics of the country would result in his swift acquittal on the ground of self-defense, Mr. Conway had surrendered himself.

Too late he had realized that he was decidedly in wrong. Times had indeed changed. Having incurred the enmity of the political powers, he would stand no chance at all of a fair trial. He was a poor trout who had swallowed the hook, and the zealous district attorney was the skilled fisherman who would reel him in.

But Mr. Conway at birth had been endowed with a large amount of Irish wit, which a couple of scores of years of precarious and sometimes doubtful living as a gunman had supplemented with a large amount of guile. At one time he had made the statement that brains would do more than dynamite to get a man out of jail. And right now he had a grand chance to try out the brains.

The jailer was a nervous man, and of this Mr. Conway brutally took advantage. For two days he threatened to commit suicide. Deliberately, as long as the prison official would listen, he verbally drew gruesome pictures of himself with his throat cut from ear to ear. He succeeded in getting the jailer's goat, so much so that the official refused to allow his morbid captive the use of a knife or a fork. Mr. Conway was forced to eat with a pewter spoon, and even this was taken away from him after each meal.

The third day was Sunday, and Sunday in the Dos Pinos jail was the day of corn-starch pudding for dessert. Corn-starch was one of Mr. Conway's pet abominations, but this time he had use for it. He lathered his face with pudding and sprinkled this with dust gathered from the corners of his cell. His large bandanna provided the needed loop. With a short knot at the ends he tied the cloth over one of the bars that formed part of the grilled ceiling.

The jailer's footstep in the corridor was the signal for Mr. Conway to stand erect on his bunk, slip his head through the loop of the bandanna and crook his knees. The jailer, missing Mr. Conway's usual gibing invitation for another poker game, stopped and peered through the bars.

He gasped in horror. Mr. Conway apparently had carried out his threat of suicide, by hanging himself. With hasty, fumbling fingers the official unlocked and entered the cell. A closer look in the dim light at the corn-starch-and-dust-plastered face of his prisoner proved all too convincing.

Hastily backing out of the cell, he started as a matter of habit to lock the door. But why lock up a dead man? The keys slipped from his nervous fingers. He snatched them up and fled toward the front of the building. A moment later sounded the slam of the outer door. The jailer was scurrying toward the coroner's office, half a mile distant.

By the time he had returned with the official investigator of deaths, Mr. Conway, having regained his horse, his Winchester and his Colt, and carrying a huge grin, was two miles out of town and going strong toward the Colorado River.

"NO, SIR-REE!" said the rancher. "Fifty bucks is my price, and it's worth it. You ain't payin' me a cent to keep my mouth shut, understand, but my skiff leaks—some—and that makes it a gamble worth the money—to me. Just take a look at that river."

Mr. Conway looked, then glanced apprehensively back across the desert hills to the eastward. Again his gaze turned to the three-quarter-mile-wide, swirling, surging, yellow flood-waters of the Colorado. Mr. Conway was no navigator; the stretch of eddying water made him feel helpless.

"Here's your fifty—if we can start now."

"Sure we can. Put your stuff in the boat."

Mr. Conway hastened to unsaddle his horse and place the saddle, blankets and rifle in the fragile twelve-foot skiff. There was some slight difficulty in getting the horse to take to the water. The rancher finally dragged him in and fastened the end of the reins to a nail in the stern of the boat. Then, with the horse swimming behind and towed by the reins, they started for California, the rancher at the oars and Mr. Conway busy with an empty tomato-can bailing to keep the skiff afloat.

Half-way across, the strain on the reins bent the nail. The horse, freed from the boat, started back for the Arizona shore. Catching him was no easy task, for the animal turned away each time the rancher maneuvered the craft into a position for

Mr. Conway to grab the bridle. At last the rancher cut off the painter. Mr. Conway used this as a riata and roped the swimming horse. Just in time, too, for the frantic animal was within fifty feet of the shore.

The leaky skiff was now half-filled with water. Mr. Conway tied the loose end of the painter around his waist, and began setting a record for fast bailing with a tomato-can.

In a thicket of willows four miles below the starting-point the skiff literally bumped into California. With solid land again beneath his boots, Mr. Conway pulled out his bandanna and mopped the sweat of apprehension from his face. He had been scared, and he admitted it.

"Say, you sure earned your coin," he said. "But who's gonna bail the water out goin' back?"

"Golly! I never thought of that!"

The rancher's face was a study in emotion.

Mr. Conway grinned, saddled up and rode away to the westward, leaving the rancher scratching his head over the problem.

Twenty-four hours later Mr. Conway cocked an eye aloft at the desert sun and decided that it was time to eat. But "eats" were not to be obtained, for his horse lay dead some six miles distant back toward the Colorado. The skittish animal had possessed one aversion, namely, horned toads. When, during the night before, one of the harmless little creatures had crossed his path, the horse had shied and leaped to one side. This side leap on rocky ground had caused a bad fall. One hoof had wedged between two rocks, and the fall had snapped a foreleg. And to make it worse, the horse had fallen upon and smashed flat the canteen that Mr. Conway had purchased from the friendly rancher.

The sight of the smashed canteen had had the effect of increasing Mr. Conway's thirst. Therefore at daybreak, after shooting the horse, he had set out in search of a spring known to desert travelers as "The Frog Hole." He had found the water, such as it was, but now regretted his lack of foresight in neglecting to take with him the scanty rations that were in a gunnysack tied to the saddle. Six miles back to the horse, and six miles on the return journey to the spring would mean twelve miles without water. Mr. Conway decided to wait until the heat of the day had abated.

He gazed around and spat in disgust as his eye met nothing but an arid sun-baked waste of sand and fantastic rock formation.

"So this is California, land of milk, honey and lots of money! Oh, well, it might be worse," he cogitated, then centered his mind on a nice problem, namely: Would the pangs of hunger eventually prove sharper than the ache of blistered feet? The answer can not be set in type.

Morosely he surveyed the mangy, purple heights of the Wolftooth Mountains, which lay thirty miles distant across a burning, heat-eddying desert caldron. In the cañons of the Wolftooths lay safety and—cold water. No California officer would be likely to look for him there, in the event that the Arizona authorities had telegraphed the information that the much wanted "Short-Hand" Conway had succeeded in crossing the Colorado.

Mr. Conway retraced his steps to the water-hole, drank a little of the nauseatingly warm, stagnant fluid, then pulled out a limp muslin bag and nursed the last few tobacco crumbs into a very slender cigaret.

"Golly," he cogitated, gazing distastefully at the spot where the water slowly oozed from some subterranean source, "that stuff runs about two per cent. pure niter. Well, it ain't gonna hurt me—much. And it's wet anyway."

Again he cursed the tragic mishap of the smashed canteen, a scurvy trick of fate which had effectually marooned him on this small island of dampness in the midst of a sea of eddying heat-waves which stretched to the limit of vision and turned into life-and-hope-stealing illusions and mirages.

With no food and no tobacco to comfort him, in the course of another hour the heat and a few pestiferous flies had succeeded thoroughly in souring whatever milk of human kindness remained in his system. Any man on horseback who approached the water-hole was due to bump into some concentrated hard luck—for himself.

Another hour passed, and Mr. Conway's frame of mind had curdled still more, when far out on the shimmering desert a cloud of dust caught his apathetic gaze. A little later the cloud resolved itself into a horseman driving two pack-animals.

Hope has set records for high jumping, but Mr. Conway's breast stirred but little. Where, a couple of hours back, he might unhesitatingly have committed even murder to get out of his desperate position, now he was inclined to moderation. He had been given time to think. So far he had committed no offense against the law in California, and the latter State was a sanctuary which he now had no desire to violate. Therefore he put on a deep-sea thinking act.

Finally he grinned, and began hastily to pile up small boulders. His final work of preparation was to fish up the stub of a pencil and upon a cigaret paper write some cryptic words and figures.

His labors finished, Mr. Conway grinned again, wickedly this time, as he gazed toward the approaching rider, now less than half a mile distant. Hope was leaping high, but Mr. Conway was lying low—behind a large rock.

A few minutes later he arose abruptly. Menacingly in his hand was the old Colt .41

"Better git!" he warned the horseman. "It's open season for claim-jumpers!"

The newcomer turned for a hostile-eyed glare at the interrupter of passage to the water-hole. His hand stole toward the holster low on his thigh.

"Stick 'em up!" peremptorily barked Mr. Conway. "Reach for heaven or you'll head the other way."

With commendable promptness the horseman raised his hands. He looked into Mr. Conway's mild and sad blue eyes, and his features relaxed.

"Reg'lar desert wolf, ain't you?" he grinned. "What's the game?"

He noted Mr. Conway's position, the posture of a skilled gunman, a snap shot. He saw the hammer drawn back beneath a not too tensed thumb. By that he knew that the trigger evidently had been filed from the gun. Experience told him that here was a man with whom it would be dangerous to trifle, but he grinned again.

"The idea," explained Mr. Conway sadly, "is that I'm only protecting my rights. You're on my mining claim. She's all staked out legal. See that monument; my location notice is in it."

He pointed to a small mound of boulders.

"Mining claim—rats!" snorted the other. "You know danged well that they ain't no minerals here. And you can't stake off The Frog Hole."

"Can't I?"

A note of truculence entered Mr. Conway's ordinarily mild voice.

"Try to stop me!" he invited.

"I'm no claim-jumper," denied the other, "and, you mustached old walrus, you danged well know it! I just want to water my cayuses."

Mr. Conway highly resented being termed an old walrus, having seen a picture of one. He didn't mind the "mustached" part of it, for that was true.

"Not a chance! That there water's on my claim, and I ain't gonna let any spavined bronks muddy it all up for me. If you want water you'll have to buy it, and water's gone up."

"Buy it! Why, you saffron-tinged, misshapen, or'nary hunk of misinterpretation!" orated the horseman.

These are not his exact words, but the tune has not been changed.

"You sheep-herding, fish-brained, candelabra-faced, worse-than-forgotten imitation of a sleepless night! Do you mean to say that you're trying to keep a man away from a water-hole—*out here?*"

Mr. Conway paled, and weakened. The epithets stung—they were fighting words—but full well he realized that he deserved them.

"Son, you're there! I guess it's a gift!"

He paid grudging admiration to the other's vocabulary.

"I was figuring' on swapping my claim, and the water-hole, for one of your bronks. But I'm willing to listen to reason. I only——"

"Blast your nervy old hide!" was the interruption. "Reason? Huh! Listen, and you'll hear it—as soon as I think up a few more things to call you. Now what's the idea of staking off the Frog Hole?"

"The idea," explained Mr. Conway sadly, "is that I'm plumb hung up here. I need a cayuse or a canteen, or both. I'm not stickin' you up to git them, understand. I know my rights, and I'm keepin' you covered because you're trespassin'. I ain't takin' no chances on having my claim jumped, so just drop your six-gun into the dust. To use more than one thumb and one finger will be a sure way of providing me with more hosses than I need. Don't take any chances, son; I can let daylight through you before you can bat an eye."

The affair so far had not gone quite to Mr. Conway's liking. He knew the horseman could be more deadly than a rattlesnake. The stranger was in his early thirties; but his face, even when he flashed his ready grin, was hard. And his eyes now were harder than onyx, and as dark. But it was his nonchalance that was disconcerting.

"I'm willing to oblige," he drawlingly replied, "but I sure hate to get the gun jammed full of sand. Come and get it, or let me hand it to you."

Mr. Conway's eyes flicked several times. This was better. Inwardly he began to grin. He would let the other man see just how far his contemplated trick would go with an old gunman.

"HUH!" he grunted. "*You* ain't lackin' any sand, that's a hog-tied cinch," admiringly. "Reckon I'll have to humor you till we get better acquainted. Give me the gun."

He stepped forward.

The other gingerly pulled out his Colt, flipped it in the air and caught it by the barrel, but as he caught it Mr. Conway's gun poked him in the ribs. Mr. Conway's left hand reached up and took the weapon butt first as it was extended to him.

By a forced smile the horseman gamely acknowledged defeat. Mr. Conway flipped out the cylinder, ejected the shells, then returned the weapon.

"Put it back in the holster and try it over again," he invited.

The other man rather sheepishly holstered the Colt.

"Say," he blurted out, "how many notches on your gun?"

"Too many," confessed Mr. Conway. "Let's see you roll it."

"Here goes! I guess I'll look like an amateur to an old-timer like you."

The stranger started to hand his Colt, butt foremost, to his captor. Mr. Conway reached tentatively.

Like a flash, in a bare fraction of a second, the gun reversed, and snapped.

"Fast—fast!" was the compliment. "Son, you've sure wasted your youth in practising that. It ain't worth while any more."

Mr. Conway walked around to the other side of the horse, again pressed his Colt against the other's ribs and pulled a .30-30 carbine from the saddle scabbard.

"Now, son, I'm gonna make you a proposition. For water out of your canteen and a ride on a pack-hoss your bronks can use my private water-hole."

As Mr. Conway glanced toward the spring his jaw dropped in chagrin. The pack animals, unwatched by him, had stolen a march. They were now drinking from the water-hole.

"Blisterin' heck!" he ejaculated in disgust. "That scheme is two-thirds shot full of holes."

He sized up the pack-horses. One of them, a sorrel, was long-legged, rangy in build. With knowing eye its points were sized up.

"How much do you want for the sorrel bone-yard? I'd like to buy him if the price ain't too steep."

"Buy him! You're sure an uncertain *hombre*. First you hold me up, then you want to *buy* a horse."

"Hold up nothin'!" disavowed Mr. Conway. "I told you I was only makin' sure that you wa'n't gonna jump my claim. How much for the sorrel?"

"I might sell him for sixty—some day. But I need him right now. Got to rush that stuff into the Wolftooth country. I'm wonderin' why you don't steal one of the horses."

"I never was a hoss-thief!" was the retort. "And they ain't no warrants out ag'in' me in California, so I ain't gonna borrow trouble—unless I just gotta do it to git away from here."

Again the rider flashed his ready grin. All the while he had been subjecting Mr. Conway to minute scrutiny. He had noted the missing trigger finger.

"Shot off?" he inquired casually, his gaze on the gun hand.

"Maybe!" grunted Mr. Conway, puzzled, sensing that the question was more than casual.

"Three years ago—below the border?" followed another query.

"Maybe it *did*—and then again, *maybe* it did."

The other's smile turned quizzical.

"You seem to fit the description of Short-Hand Conway."

"That so?"

"All right!" laughed the other. "I'm glad you admit it so freely. That time you stepped in and saved Whitey Dunnigan from being turned into mince-meat by——"

"Aw, shucks! Five Mexes wa'n't so much," growled the embarrassed Mr. Conway.

"One of them got your trigger meat-hook anyway. You see, I've sort of been classing you as a guy I'd be willing to do a good turn for. Whitey was my pal."

"You've got me pegged right. I'm Conway. But who in heck are you?"

"Carroll—Bob Carroll. Is the stick-up thing still on, or do I get my guns back? I'm sorry I called you those names."

"Don't let that worry you. I'll save them up and use them on somebody else. About the guns—Bob Carroll doesn't spell anything to me. Never heard of you before—under that name. Aw, heck, sure you can have the guns back. It wouldn't do you any good to smoke me up—or try to.

"And calling it a stick-up is all wrong. I was only protecting my claim from being jumped. Get that right."

"Have it your own way," laughed Carroll. "You were trying to jump the price of water, too, but I won't hold that against you—seeing that things are as they are."

"I only *tried* to boost it," was the contention. "And it didn't work out worth the feathers on a lizard."

Carroll dismounted, shook hands with Conway and regained his weapons. He started to lead his saddle-horse toward the water-hole.

"Say, got any tobacco to spare?"

Carroll turned to answer the question.

"Sure! Lots of it. Go and get a can out of a saddle-bag."

Mr. Conway started toward the pack-animals. He stopped and inquired—

"Which hoss?"

"The sorrel, I think. Both cayuses have light loads so's I could make fast time."

On each pack-saddle were hung rawhide bags, each slightly smaller in dimensions than a kerosene-case holding two five-gallon cans. The dry hide was as stiff as boards; the edges of the bags were square like boxes. The bags were open at the top, but small tarpaulins covered both saddles and their loads.

Mr. Conway removed the tarpaulin from the sorrel, and from one bag dragged out three sides of bacon, a ten-pound sack of flour and a cloth bag filled with dried beans. This uncovered the bottom layer. No tobacco was revealed, but the other contents served to arouse and hold the searcher's interest. There was a layer of cardboard boxes, each containing twenty rifle cartridges. And the boxes numbered at least fifteen.

Carroll looked up from the water-hole.

"Guess the tobacco's on the other side," he announced.

After replacing the provisions in the saddle-bag, Mr. Conway ducked around to the other side of the horse. This time he discovered the tobacco tins, a dozen of them, and then dug further to verify his suspicions as to the bottom layer in the second bag. It was composed of even more cartridge boxes than the other. The horse carried at least seven hundred rounds of ammunition!

Among other things, Mr. Conway possessed a responsive imagination. Seven hundred rifle cartridges! And perhaps there were as many more on the other pack-horse! That meant action—somewhere. A private war undoubtedly. He imagined he felt an itch in the spot where once his hand had been normal in the possession of a nervous trigger finger.

Mr. Conway sighed, bestirred himself gathering fuel and started a fire. Presently the two men squatted down to a menu of bacon, fried biscuits and coffee. The horses grazed near by on cacti.

Luther Burbank is famed, among other achievements, for having rendered cactus available for fodder, by removing the spines. He used science. Mr. Conway obtained the same result with a hatchet.

Mr. Carroll rolled another cigaret, lighted it by borrowing Mr. Conway's glowing stub, then leaned back into the scanty shade of a yucca.

"You particularly stressed the fact that there are no warrants out against you in California," he began. "Not to get personal—you don't have to answer—are you on the dodge from Arizona or Nevada?"

"Maybe!"

Mr. Conway grew wary-eyed and unobtrusively moved his leg to bring his holster into a handier position.

"Well, old-timer, it's all right with me. I might be able to help you."

"I'll admit there's no warrants out ag'in' me in California, which ain't what you might call an incriminatin' admission. And I want things to stay that way; that's why I didn't hold you up.

"I ain't takin' any chances. I'm gittin' along in years, and I crave a little peace for a change. I want to settle down quietly—and I don't want to do it in the 'pen.'"

There was a decided gleam of interest in Carroll's eyes, followed by the birth of an idea that caused him to cough—or something.

"So you want to settle down, eh? You seem to be the kind of an *hombre* I can help along; so why not shoot the whole story?"

"Not much of a yarn. I'm in wrong with the bunch of side-windin' politicians across the creek because I just naturally had to bump off their hired gunman. That's all. I might mention that I ran a whopper of a rannygazoo on the jailer and made a clean getaway."

"So that's it," mused Mr. Carroll aloud. "I was wondering why you were on the dodge. Any more warrants out?"

Mr. Conway pondered. Now that he had admitted this much, there would be no harm in telling more. Carroll seemed friendly. He coughed deprecatingly.

"Oh, there's seven or eight or mebbe ten old ones that had been pigeonholed. Those scavengin' politicians dug them up; they wanted to get enough on me to make it a life term and then hang me to make it certain."

"You're in bad, old-timer; but you're safe enough with me—as long as I haven't a warrant."

"What? Say, who in heck are you—*what* are you?" tensely.

"Me? Oh, I'm a deputy sheriff."

Mr. Carroll's tone was light; in his eyes was a laugh.

Almost faster than the eye could follow, as swift as the strike of a snake, Mr. Conway's gun had flashed into view, the hammer drawn back beneath his thumb, the muzzle pointed skyward, ready to pull down.

"Easy, old-timer," drawled Carroll, nonchalantly licking the cigaret he had started to roll. "I know almost your whole history. Whitey Dunnigan told it to me. To put it bluntly, you're almost pathetic in your desire to stay on the right side of the law—now, as you put it, you're getting along in years. I'm for you, and can use you. This end of the county needs you."

Mr. Conway looked into the other's eyes, looked long and searchingly, and was baffled. Slowly he replaced the Colt.

"And you're a depity?" he breathed. "Workin' at it?"

"I sure am!"

He jerked a thumb toward the pack horses.

"Those supplies are for Sheriff Summers' posse," Carroll went on. "Ever hear of the Yucca Kid?"

"Yes, I've *heard* of him," heavily.

"Friend of yours?" asked the deputy casually.

"I ain't ever met up with him, and I ain't hankerin' to. He's got the name of bein' too smooth—as slippery as a fresh-peeled tree, and a double-crosser of his pals if it will pay him."

"Yeh, I guess his pals know that and watch him to protect themselves."

"Where does he figger in this deal?"

"We've got him cornered in a blind cañon."

"U-u-mm! That explains the load of shells."

"We'll likely need all of them. We've managed to kill off four of his gang, but the Kid and his pal are holding out. Seeing that you're so anxious to keep a lily-white reputation in California, you might horn in and help us get them. Summers will be glad to swear you in as a deputy. Three dollars a day, a horse, bacon, beans and ammunition is better than being stranded here."

"You're darned tootin' it is! I'll just amble along and sit in the game. We can load all the stuff on the other hoss and I can ride the sorrel bareback. What's the layout?"

"It started with the lost Florenden mine. Ever hear of it? No? Well, some years ago old man Florenden blew into Needles with some specimens of gold ore rich enough to make you blink. But he was plumb batty—reckon the sun had got him and he couldn't remember the location of the claim he had staked. There was quite a flurry in San Berdoo prospecting circles, as you might put it, and —— knows how many parties have tried to find the rich strike. None of them did.

"The old man finally recovers his mind, but he's been too ailing to take another desert trip. His family in San Berdoo have been nursing him for years. Before he died last month he drew a map absolutely locating the lost mine. His son, Harry, grew up in the mean time, and he was to set out and recoup the family fortunes.

"The boy figures on starting from Needles. He gets on the train with his outfit, but the night before he's ready to start he takes a few drinks and talks too much. The Yucca Kid bumped him off and stole the map. A flock of witnesses saw the killing, and when the news was wired to San Berdoo, Summers loads his posse and horses into a baggage-car and 'Santa Fés' in a hurry to Needles. From there we trailed the Kid and bottled him up.

"Now we've got to play a waiting game. It's sure death to go after him. He and his partner can make a Winchester speak any language. One of our deputies, Ike Flint, got potted at three hundred yards with nothing but his forehead showing above a rock—a plumb center shot. Summers will be glad to swear you in in Ike's place. We're going to stay on the job till we finish it; that's why I went into Needles for supplies."

Mr. Conway reviewed the situation. He liked it.

"And if I git depitized by Summers and make good, that'll kinda establish my standing on this side of the Colorado, hey?"

"Sure as shooting! Summers is square. If he takes you on, he'll have a convenient lapse of memory if any warrants float across from Arizona. It's your chance to get a fresh start."

For a time there was silence. Mr. Conway finally squinted at the sun. They were waiting to cross the blistering thirty-mile stretch at night.

"Quite a spell to sundown," he remarked. "Got a deck of cards?"

"Sure! Couple of new decks I was bringing to the boys. How about a little game of stud?"

"Suits me," said Mr. Conway, secretly rejoicing.

Mr. Carroll felt the same way, having not the slightest doubt but that within a short time he would be able to pocket all the funds carried by the other man. It might be mentioned that when not engaged in other work—work involving the use of a gun and nerve—Mr. Carroll kept up with the overhead by his ability to make a deck of cards say "uncle" when speech was desired.

The game began, with rifle cartridges for chips. At sundown Mr. Conway possessed over three hundred in cash, three horses, their loads and equipment and about everything else in sight. Mr. Carroll was the owner of a vague suspicion, the clothes he wore, and the right to talk to himself. Even his six-gun now belonged to the better man. He managed to smile, however, even though the smile had a southerly twist.

"You sure hooked me, old-timer, and now I want you to help me out. Summers and the bunch will laugh themselves sick if they find out that I got beaten at stud and lost even the shells I was bringing in. It'll be worse than that; Summers will raise—— with fancy trimmings.

"The horses were mine, and suppose you ride the pinto till we get close to camp. Then I want you to favor me by changing off and riding the sorrel. That'll let me out, see, with the bunch.

"You've got your own guns, so you won't have use for mine. For them and the supplies and the pack-horses I'll be owing you, say, three hundred bucks. You keep the pinto and the saddle; I can tell the bunch that I sold them to you. Savvy?"

"Sure, that's all right," Mr. Conway hastened to assure him. "You owe me three hundred; let it go at that. I don't want to get you into trouble with the sheriff." Pause. "Let's get started."

AT DAYBREAK, in the foothills of the Wolftooth, they stopped long enough to boil coffee and fry bacon. Then followed three hours of hard going. The trail wound up through deep cañons, climbed ridges, descended into veritable mazes of gullies and climbed again. They paused to breathe the horses.

"Say," propounded Mr. Conway, "what good is a mine up here? They can never get the machinery in, and it wouldn't pay to carry the ore out."

"No? That ore is so danged rich that a burro-load will be worth fifteen hundred or so. A couple of hundred burros——"

"Fifteen hundred! Golly, there might be millions in it. No wonder there's been killings over it!"

"And there's liable to be more of them," added Carroll.

By this time they were in a cañon that showed signs of widening. Soon it opened into a basin, perhaps twenty acres in size. The flat was rich in grass, and three horses grazed, restrained by hobbles. A brilliant ribbon of green marked the course of a spring trickling down the hillside.

Part way up the eastern slope of the basin blazed a camp-fire. Two men were in sight.

"Better let me go on ahead," suggested Carroll. "I want to talk Summers into taking you on."

Mr. Conway showed alarm.

"Make it good and strong," he begged. "I sure do want to get a stand-in with the sheriff."

"Leave it to me, old-timer," replied Carroll.

Mr. Conway watched him ride up the hill and dismount near the fire. One of the two men approached, pointed with an obviously angry gesture down the hill, then put his arms akimbo, and waited.

Carroll began talking. Soon, as Mr. Conway watched, it was evident that Carroll's talk was having effect. The attitude of the angry one relaxed.

He turned and shouted up the hill. In response to this summons three men appeared at widely separated points among the rocks on the crest. All of them carried rifles. Two hurried down to the fire; the third disappeared again.

Followed a short conversation; then Carroll turned and beckoned. Mr. Conway hastened up the hill, forcing the sorrel in his eagerness to get on the right side of the law.

He sized up the four strangers. One in particular, the man with whom Carroll had argued, was the type that Mr. Conway's experienced eye labeled—

"Deadly!"

Physically he was not impressive, being of medium height and build. But he was thin-faced, sharp-nosed, lantern-jawed; his hands betrayed restlessness. Mr. Conway recalled another sheriff of this type, the agent of the law in a certain border county a score of years back, a man who depended upon nervous energy and speed rather than physical force, fast as a flash on the draw, and a ruthless killer when it came to a showdown with outlaws.

Mr. Conway swung off his horse, eyed curiously by the members of the posse, two of whom were grinning.

"Sheriff, this is Short-Hand Conway," was Carroll's introduction. "And, Conway, the guy with the beauty spots called freckles is 'Speck' Malone. This is Bill Hargis. And the bird with the insipid grizzly-bear grin is 'Sandy' Bowen. 'Pinkeye' Sweitzer is watching the cañon. You'll meet him later."

After shaking hands with each in turn Mr. Conway's gaze returned to the sheriff. He looked into close-set, clear, cold, gray eyes in which lay a smoldering, enigmatic light that reminded him of a pet puma he had seen in Prescott. Summers spoke.

"Bob tells me that you can beat him on the draw, and that you're the fellow who saved Whitey Dunnigan down in Cananea. He says he's explained the situation here to you, and he's told me of what you're up against. Do you want to join us?"

"I sure do."

"That's fine!"

Mr. Conway noted a brief flicker in the sheriff's eyes. It might have been a hint of amusement, a smile of satisfaction or a show of liking and friendliness. Mr. Conway did not stop to analyze, for Summers continued speaking:

"You'll have your work cut out for you—to make good with me. Come along and I'll show you."

Mr. Conway followed the officer up the hill. He noted at the same time that Carroll started toward the spot where, a few minutes before, the fifth man of the posse had disappeared among the rocks. At the summit the sheriff ducked low and sidled up behind a rock. Mr. Conway imitated his caution.

"Take a look," invited Summers, "but dodge back quick and look again from another place. They shoot to kill—and they make center shots if you give them half a chance."

Mr. Conway raised his head above the top of the rock. Below him lay a small valley, from three to four hundred yards in width and half a mile in length. Both ends were closed by perpendicular walls, the northern one at least one hundred feet in height, the southern one perhaps forty. The eastern side was a bulk of sheer towering cliff. It was apparent at a glance that three sides of the valley offered no hope of escape for the outlaws.

At the foot of the opposite cliff was the mouth of a tunnel, where old Florenden had blasted and burrowed as he followed a stringer leading into the big vein of gold. Rocks and earth lay heaped in a semi-circle in front of the tunnel, and from the shelter of this débris a Winchester suddenly spat. A jagged bit of stone flew up and sent Mr. Conway's hat sailing. "*Whee-e-e*," sounded the weird scream of a flattened bullet "diminuendoing" westward.

Mr. Conway dropped back to shelter.

"I told you to dodge *pronto*," Summers remarked in a matter-of-fact tone. "That was poor shooting—for them. Must have missed by four or five inches. Now you can see what we're up against. We've got to starve them out, and how long that'll take is a problem. I'm due back in San Bernardino before this."

Mr. Conway recovered his hat and thoughtfully inspected the new dimple the bit of rock had dented into the top of the crown.

"And where do I come in?" he inquired.

"Right here—to speed things up. There's only one way out of the trap—the valley here—and that's a trail about two hundred feet to the north. One of my men is watching it every minute. Two men watch it at night. I want a man to sneak down the trail in the darkness, hide out and wait till daylight. Then he may be able to flank those birds with rifle-fire.

"But Ike's death has been a lesson to us. Even Bob Carroll draws the line at going down into the valley. Down there the birds in the tunnel will have the advantage. Bob says they've got advantage enough now—with their accurate shooting."

"Huh! I take it that you want *me* to be the sacrifice."

"Not exactly that. You can use your judgment about going. But if you help to speed things up by potting those two *hombres*, why, you'll be helping yourself. I'll do anything for you. You can be my head deputy if you want the job. And you'll be safe as far as Arizona warrants are concerned."

Safe from Arizona warrants! This promise was the deciding point with Mr. Conway. He would attempt the job at which the deputies had balked. After stealing two more hasty looks down into the valley he seated himself with his back against a rock, rolled a cigaret, then grinned at the sheriff.

"Why don't you send a man around to the top of the cliff above the tunnel? Or to the head of the valley? From either place it will be easy to drop lead down behind that dump of rocks."

"Haven't we tried it?" growled Summers. "It would take a pair of wings to get a man up there. The head of the valley would be the easiest. A sixty-foot ladder would make it."

"All I want is about a sixty-foot rope," said Mr. Conway. "I'm going to drop into the valley tonight from the lower end."

AT TWO o'clock in the morning Mr. Conway was in the valley. Silently, in his stocking feet, he felt his way along the base of the eastern cliff toward the tunnel. Behind him a rope of halters tied together dangled from the lowest point on the rocks. Stationed at the upper end of the rope were Sheriff Summers and Bob Carroll. Three sharp jerks at the rope was the prearranged signal for them to pull Mr. Conway up the face of the rocky wall in case he wished to confer with them or had found unfeasible his plan of single-handed attack.

Half an hour later Mr. Conway, pursuing Indian tactics, had reached within twenty feet of the tunnel's mouth. There, flat on his stomach in the deep shadow of the cliff, he lay listening. Boots had been discarded as being out of the question; the slightest sound might draw gun-fire. He had even removed his belt, lest the buckle clatter on a rock as he crawled along. A knotted bit of rope now held up his trousers. His Colt had been carried inside his shirt. He had even rolled his shirt sleeves above his elbows for fear the faint click of a wrist button against a rock might spoil his plan.

Now, the Colt in his right hand, with infinite caution he drew himself ahead six inches. Again he paused to listen. A full minute elapsed before he moved another few inches. He was careful about his breathing.

Exaggerated caution? No! Within a few feet, on the other side of the dump, lay an armed and desperate man. An occasional body movement, a faint swish of cloth on dirt, enabled Mr. Conway to locate the position of the man on guard.

The very silence of the mountain night rendered more difficult Mr. Conway's task. The faint, faint yapping of a distant coyote and the occasional call of a night bird were the only sounds.

His fingers settled on a tiny pebble. He drew back his right arm. His shoulder joint creaked alarmingly. Momentarily he held his breath. Then with a full-arm swing he threw the stone. It clattered on the ground a score of feet on the far side of the dump.

A quick rustle and then silence on the part of the watcher betrayed alarm. Came the soft click of a rifle being cocked.

Mr. Conway flung another pebble, then cautiously arose to a crouching position. He saw the guard, a vague blur in the darkness, less than ten feet away, his eyes and faculties evidently concentrated in the opposite direction.

Two quick steps to the top of the dump, then a rock rolled from beneath Mr.

Conway's foot. It was no time for indecision; nor was there time for thought.

Mr. Conway acted on instinct. He leaped as the guard turned. The butt of his Colt crashed on the other's skull.

His left hand encountered the rifle. He seized it. The guard's knees were bending; he slumped to the ground.

The light snores of the sleeper within the tunnel had ceased abruptly. Mr. Conway stepped in haste to one side of the tunnel's mouth, and stuck out his foot as the second man, rifle in hand, came running into the open. The runner fell sprawling; his rifle clattered on to the dump. Before he could arise Mr. Conway had straddled the small of his back. The muzzle of the old .41 was pressed hard behind the ear of the prostrate man.

"Lay still! You're under arrest!" announced Mr. Conway.

"Under arrest!" spluttered the other. "Which one of us is crazy? Why don't you shoot and be done with it?"

"Sure, you're under arrest."

Mr. Conway's tone was almost gay, now that he had pulled off the coup that would put him strongly into the good graces of the sheriff.

"The —— I am! Who in blazes are you?"

"I'm one of Summers' depities."

Mr. Conway cast a wary glance toward the prostrate form of the man he had first struck down.

"The —— you are! "Why, you ——"

The rest of the peroration was unnecessarily profane, but in it Mr. Conway caught an unmistakable ring of sincerity, and was puzzled.

"Which one of you's the Yucca Kid?" he inquired rather aimlessly.

Something seemed to be wrong.

"The Yucca Kid! You certainly *are* crazy. *I'm Sheriff Summers!*"

"Sure, sure!" said Mr. Conway soothingly. "And I'm Alexander the Great!"

He looked toward the western side of the valley, opened his mouth to utter the cowboy yell that would bring four deputies to his assistance, then suddenly hesitated and silently exhaled the full breath he had drawn for the shout. He had been struck by what he would have termed "a —— of a big hunch."

Little oddities in the manners of the men with whom he had leagued and slight discrepancies in their stories suddenly loomed big. He was glad he had not yelled. It might be better to investigate a little. His hunch was very strong.

"Looky here," he said, prodding his captive, "you say you're the sheriff. Can you prove it?"

"Of course I can. Let me up. My badge is on my vest. In my pocket I've got the remains of the warrants for the Yucca Kid and half a dozen John Does."

Mr. Conway did not allow the other man to arise. Mechanically he kept the gun muzzle against his head and continued to sit astride him.

"Ain't you one of the Kid's men?" finally inquired the other, a new note in the voice that a few moments before had been grating, desperate.

"——, no! I was sworn in on the posse to get the Kid."

"You're either a —— fool or a stranger—perhaps both," said the sheriff. "Were you to get a reward if you got us?"

"I sure was—a big one."

"You'd have got it in the shape of a bullet in the back. The Kid has been up to his old tricks. He's got a brain, and almost as big a queer sense of humor as Bob Carroll. Did you meet Bob?"

"He's the one who rung me in on the posse."

"And he's also the nerviest, dirtiest, coldbloodedest fox in seven States. He's more than a match for the Yucca Kid. I'm Sheriff Summers, all right. Let me get up and prove it."

"Describe the Yucca Kid."

"He's lean, hatchet-faced and cold-eyed."

"Correct. I'll let you up, but it's the Kid himself who saved you. If I hadn't thought of a few things I would have yelled for help the moment I had you down.

"He told me to shoot both of you, and take no chances. He sat all over any possibility of taking you alive. That didn't ring quite right for a sheriff. I had thought it queer that none of the posse showed tinware—stars or badges. And they all watched me like hawks.

"Besides that, I didn't exactly like their drawing aside every once in a while for whispered talks. And a couple of them couldn't keep their faces straight. I know why now; they certainly had one rich joke. —— them!"

The sheriff had turned over to a sitting position. Mr. Conway was on his knees, still keeping his gun on the other man.

"That Colt seems to doubt me. Here's my badge."

Mr. Conway felt of it in the darkness.

"Seems all right. Now if you're the sheriff, tell me how you got cornered."

"Like a bunch of calves. When I heard that six men were out with the Kid I gathered a posse of five. They were picked shots, and the only available men of the type I wanted.

"We trailed the Kid's gang in here—two days behind them. Then we lost the trail among the rocks on top of the ridge, the one right across the valley. We sighted the tunnel, and guessed it to be Florenden's mine. So we all rode down Florenden's trail into the valley—to investigate.

"The Kid's gang came out of concealment in the rocks above and opened fire. We didn't have a chance. Bud Hopkins and me managed to reach the tunnel, and we've held out since.

"The gang shot down four of us, and from inside the tunnel we watched them pumping more lead into the bodies. Then they started shooting our horses. That's when I potted one of them."

"Ike Flint," supplied Mr. Conway.

"So Ike was one of them. Too bad! Well, the Kid's been trying to get us ever since. He's *got* to get us, to protect himself, after the butchery of four deputies. Say, where's Bud?"

"Right there. He'll come around all right. I cracked him with my gun-butt, and I didn't hit hard enough to kill him. He had his hat on, and the thick felt protected him to a certain extent; so don't worry."

"How'd you happen to join up with the Kid?" queried Summers, kneeling to ascertain the size of the bump on Hopkins' head.

"Golly, sheriff, that's what I want to tell you. I was tryin' to serve the law."

"Say, who in sky-blue-pink blazes threw the cliff at me?" suddenly demanded Hopkins in a rather shaky voice.

"There you are, sheriff," uttered Mr. Conway in relief. "I told you he'd come around. He wouldn't swear like that if he was gonna die."

"You're blankety right! I'm not dead yet. Oo-oh! My head!" groaned Mr. Hopkins, sitting up. "What happened? Is it still tonight, or some other time? How long have I been here?"

Then he caught sight of Mr. Conway.

"Gosh, Cal! We've got company. Who's the gent?"

"Search me. He knocked you cold and then got me dead to rights. Outside of that he seems to like us."

"I'm Michael Conway — Short - Hand Conway," was the volunteered information.

"The dickens you are!" Summers blurted out in surprize. "I've heard of you. Ain't you kinda strayed off your range?"

"Some!" was the admission. "And I'm gonna stay off."

Thereupon Mr. Conway proceeded to sketch the events leading up to his attempted use as a cats' paw by the outlaws. "And here we are," he finished.

For several moments there was silence, broken at last by Mr. Hopkins.

"Well, I'll be ——!" was his weighty utterance.

"You covered the ground there, Bud," declared Summers. "The same goes for me. Ain't it a lulu of a yarn?"

"Yarn!"

Mr. Conway was indignant.

"It's the Gospel truth. I've shot square with you, sheriff—jail-break and all."

"Jail-break!"

Summers choked slightly.

"That wasn't a jail-break; it's the funniest thing I've heard this year."

"Now looky here, sheriff. I went into this thing because I wanted to be a law-abidin' citizen—in California. I was serious; it meant so —— much to me. And I let a gang of coyotes pull an awful whizzer on me. I'm sore—clean through! I'm gonna get back at them—plenty. To —— with immunity. This is a personal matter now. So long!"

Mr. Conway started to climb over the dump, a seething, boiling vessel of wrath. Then he stopped.

"Say, you fellows take off your boots and sneak along the cliff till you come to a rope. It's down at the lowest rocks. Wait there. Don't make a sound. This is gonna be good. The first guy to come down the rope will be the Yucca Kid. And I won't send a blue-print along with him, either. Use your own judgment."

Hopkins chuckled, despite his throbbing head.

"You won't have to send a blue-print," was Summers' dry assurance. "But suppose they've heard us talking?"

"They won't. We've been darned low

and earnest. And I've got the 'out' that it was the two of you talkin'. They couldn't have heard the words—if they heard anything at all."

MR. CONWAY disappeared in the darkness.

Five minutes later he jerked three times at the rope and was pulled up the cliff.

"What in —— is the matter with you?" demanded the Kid. "Cold feet?"

"No! It's a cinch. I crawled right up to the dump and listened to them talk. But it was too big a gamble without a little help.

"I want you to come with me, sheriff. You've seen that rock about a hundred feet this side of the tunnel. You lay behind that, see, and give me half an hour or so to sneak around to the other side of the dump.

"Then you shoot, *once*, savvy, and that shot'll be the signal for me to jump up and pot them. They'll both be lookin' this way, and I can get them from behind. I'll pot them from six or eight feet away."

"That's the only way to do it—to make sure," agreed the Kid. "I'll fire the shot in half an hour, and they'll be easy pickings for you."

"Let's go," suggested Mr. Conway. "Better take off your boots here. Your feet won't get cut, if you walk slow enough."

The Kid sat down. Messrs. Conway and Carroll pulled off his boots.

"You're heavier than me," Mr. Conway then pointed out. "Carroll and me will lower you down, then Carroll alone can handle my weight without trouble."

The Kid readily fell in with this suggestion; when possible he played safe.

With the two men paying out on the rope, the Kid descended into the valley. The rope suddenly went slack. From below, Mr. Conway heard a faint sound, suggesting the smash of a gun-butt on a Stetson, with the Kid's head inside the Stetson.

"What was that?" inquired Mr. Carroll suspiciously, leaning over to peer below.

"This!" replied Mr. Conway, as he blackjacked the other man with his Colt and pulled him back from the edge.

Then he hauled up the rope, tied one end of it beneath the arms of the unconscious Mr. Carroll, pushed him over the edge and started lowering him down to the waiting officers. He heard the click of handcuffs. The rope went slack.

"Tally two!" he called out, exuberantly but softly.

"Got any more?" was the sheriff's guarded answer.

"Not here. But hold your hosses and I'll get some more. Stay there, so I'll know where you are. Come a-runnin' up the trail when you hear me yell 'Tally six'!"

With that, Mr. Conway waited until the rope had been disengaged, then pulled it up, coiled it and carried it away with him.

Speck Malone and Bill Hargis had just been relieved from their four-hour watch at the head of the trail. They had thrown fresh fuel on the camp-fire, causing it to blaze high.

This was not at all to the liking of Mr. Conway. Darkness in large quantities was what he craved, with the odds four to one against him. The alert pair of desperadoes on guard less than two hundred feet away complicated his problem. There could be no violence or holding-up tactics in the glare of the fire. The nearness of one pair of outlaws served automatically to guard the other pair.

Momentarily Mr. Conway thought of obtaining the assistance of Summers and Hopkins. Then he dismissed the idea. He was mad, sore clear through, and it would give him deep satisfaction to complete the job single-handed—to deliver all six of the gang to the sheriff.

"Deliver——"

Mr. Conway ceased cogitating, and grinned. The word had suggested a plan, one that was neat, feasible and of particular appeal to his sense of the fitting and proper.

He dropped the coil of rope on to a boulder, and walked boldly into the glare of the fire, where Speck Malone had started to pull off his boots preparatory to rolling into his blankets.

"Say, Speck, the sheriff and Carroll want you in on some kind of a scheme. You're to come back with me."

"Sufferin' Christmas-trees! Can't a man get any sleep?"

Still grumbling, Speck pulled the boot back on, rebuckled his gun-belt, took up his rifle and started for the lower end of the ridge.

With Speck going on ahead it was easy for Mr. Conway to regain possession of the rope.

"Easy—not so much noise," he cautioned. "Better let me lead the way."

"Lead, if you can do it so smoked-up well," was Speck's surly answer.

Mr. Conway guided Speck to the lowest point on the rocks.

"Where's the—sheriff?" was the suspicious inquiry.

"Down there—and no more talking. You're to join them."

"The —— I am!"

"That's Summers' order. Put your foot in this loop of the rope. I'll lower you down."

Perforce Speck obeyed. One thing the Yucca Kid did not tolerate was insubordination.

With Speck lowered half-way Mr. Conway guardedly called out:

"Here comes Speck! Watch out for him, Summers."

A few seconds later as the rope slackened came sounds indicating that Speck had been taken care of. First a thud, then, several seconds later, the click of handcuffs. Mr. Conway hauled up the rope. He didn't care at all about the method taken to prevent the prisoners from calling out the alarm when they regained consciousness. That was up to the sheriff.

After placing Speck's rifle in the patch of brush where he had cachéd those belonging to the Kid and Carroll, Mr. Conway leaned over the cliff.

"I'll be back in fifteen minutes with another one," he announced.

"What do you do to them?" was Summers' facetious query. "Hypnotize them?"

"Yes, with my Colt, if they won't believe fairy tales."

With that Mr. Conway departed to get another prisoner while the getting was good.

On schedule, fifteen minutes later, he returned with Sandy Bowen. Sandy had been easily enticed, even though his partner, Sweitzer, on guard, was suspicious of Mr. Conway. But Sandy feared the Kid's wrath if he failed to answer the alleged summons. He was lowered down the rope, to sudden unconsciousness, from which he presently emerged to discover himself handcuffed, his ankles strapped with a double turn of his gun-belt, and gagged with strips of his own shirt.

In the mean time Mr. Conway had started again toward the camp. Only two men were left—Bill Hargis, who by now undoubtedly was asleep, and Pinkeye Sweitzer, to whom Mr. Conway had not been introduced until late in the afternoon.

Mr. Sweitzer was now alone on guard at the trail. He was regarded by Mr. Conway as being the most dangerous man in the gang. His appearance and attitude were truculence personified, and he kept the bottom of his holster strapped down low on his thigh.

"I'll just leave that Sweitzer bird to the last," was Mr. Conway's decision. "He's gonna start somethin', or signs ain't worth a nickel-plated ——. He don't like me, and I got even less use for him."

Therefore Bill Hargis was awakened from peaceful slumber and notified that his presence was desired at a reception to be held by Sheriff Summers and Bob Carroll. Bill cussed with obvious sincerity, then crawled out of the blankets.

At that moment Mr. Sweitzer was revealed by the light of the fire. Walking with soft tread, his rifle at his hip menacing Mr. Conway, he approached.

"Bill, does this guy say that Carroll wants you?"

"Yeh. Why?"

"It sounds almighty queer to me—and his comin' to get us one at a time looks wrong."

"Mentionin' 'wrong,' Sweitzer, reminds me that you'll be in darned wrong with Summers for leavin' the trail unguarded," drawled Mr. Conway, his eyes narrowed and watching Sweitzer's rifle.

"What's the trail—if you're gettin' away with some funny business? I don't know who you are. The rest of the bunch think you're a —— fool. I don't.

"Bill, you hustle up to the trail. I'm goin' to investigate what's goin' on. I'm goin' to keep this guy covered till I'm sure that things are right."

He shifted the rifle, perhaps an inch.

The inch was enough for Mr. Conway. Out came his Colt. He threw himself full length sidewise. The Colt barked three times before he struck the ground. The rifle roared once, and missed by three feet. Mr. Sweitzer doubled up and lost all interest in his contemplated investigation.

No sooner had Mr. Conway fallen than he twisted around. His weapon covered Bill Hargis, who had started to reach for his gun-belt.

"Stop, Bill! I don't want to shoot you!"

Bill stopped, and raised his hands.

"Now roll yourself in your blanket."

Bill rolled. Mr. Conway strapped the gun-belt tight above Bill's elbows and bound his ankles with thongs cut from a near-by saddle. Then he hastened to the top of the ridge.

"Tally six!" was the call that faintly reached the ears of Summers and Hopkins.

Ten minutes later the officers climbed up the trail and came into the firelight. Mr. Conway had thrown on more fuel. The light revealed both men as gaunt and haggard; this appearance was emphasized by dirt and growths of beard, and exaggerated in turn by the flickering blaze.

Summers glanced sharply about, saw Sweitzer's body and the trussed-up form of Bill Hargis, then advanced with outstretched hand. Mr. Conway took it.

"Conway," said the sheriff, "I don't have to tell you that you saved our lives. But I want to tell you this: If you ever get extradited it will be because I am in my grave. You say you want to serve the law?"

"Sure! I'm gittin' along in years, and I——"

"That's enough," interrupted the sheriff. "How would you like the job of cleanin' up a town that claims it's bad?"

"First rate," grinned Mr. Conway. "Where is it?"

"On the Mohave Desert. A new boom oil-town called Derrickville. It's wide open. All the thieves, yeggs, gamblers, toughs and everything that's bad in Nevada, Arizona and California have flocked in there.

"San Bernardino County is big. I can't be everywhere at once. Derrickville as it is at present is a black eye to the whole state. They have no law there. Do you want to go there wearing a deputy's badge and *be* the law?"

"Do I? Lead me to it!"

Mr. Conway's tone was fervent.

"The job's yours, and you get no instructions except to clean it up. As you said to me, 'I won't give you a blue-print.' Use your own judgment."

The rest of the story can best be told by a letter that Sheriff Summers received six weeks later. It read as follows:

DEAR SHERIFF:

That deputy stunt is off. I am resigning hereby. The town was sure wild, but she's sure tame now. That last bunch of three shot-up birds just about cleaned up.

I ain't killed anybody yet, but that's my fault. I only shot to wing them when I had to shoot. The rest of them know that I mean business. The town's getting so good that they've started to build a church.

The town ain't incorporated yet, but yesterday I was elected mayor anyway. Also marshal, justice of the peace, coroner and a few more things that I can't think of off-hand. The salaries don't amount to much, but I'll sure get it, because I'm the tax-collector, too.

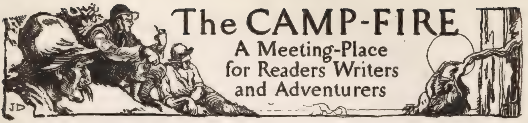
But wages ain't worrying me none. This town has the rottenest bunch of poker-players I ever had the luck to run across.

I'm sure glad Bob Carroll owned up that I won the three horses from him. Let men coming this way ride them over for me to save their stage-fare.

Also find out for me what it costs to get machinery for a laundry. I want to start one and drive the chinks out. A steam one, I mean, with some one else doing the work for me.

How much does pavement cost? I'm going to have the main street paved as soon as I collect taxes enough.

Respectfully,
MICHAEL CONWAY.



The CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

LETTERS from Bill Adams of our writers' brigade make good listening, very good. He didn't write the following for publication. I'm taking a liberty in printing it, for it is not the kind of thing that should not be passed on. Most of us need things like this far more than we need the money we struggle for:

Lindsay, California.

On the way to Frisco I rode with raggedys innumerable, and for 150 miles yesterday with one who was a dumb deaf-mute and had but one eye at that!

"We're all on the way," said one of them to me, with a whimsical look upon his travel-stained countenance, "but where is it we're all a-goin'?"

Said I to him: "D'you like flowers of the spring?"

Said he to me, with a curious look, as though a little child were homesick:

"I sure do, partner."

Says I to him: "Raggedy, old-timer, that's where we're all of us goin'—in search of a flower-bloom of spring-time."

The old battered hobo looked at me with his two eyes all a-pucker, searching for whatever it was that he thought lay hid in my mind, and presently:

"Aye—that's it! That's what it is—lookin' fer a flower as won't fade when Summer comes, eh?" said he.

And together we rode past a church with a big brazen bell and a gold cross upon its steeple; and endless folks full of sanctity—full as apple dumplings are of apple within; but much less delectable.

AND I have been of evenings sitting with captains of the gone years, whose once valiant ships are to-day deep down under. They laughed at and with me, and I made them hold their sides. And the old wife of one of them, with whom I sailed a many times in other days around the Horn, held her sides and said she:

"Oh, my—Adams, I've laughed till I'm sick!"

And at that I, too, laughed, looking at the picture of a tall low clipper on the wall above her; and hearing sea laughter and waves rolling by, with bright music as the music of eternity's happy harping.

"Come soon, and see us again, Adams," said the old white-haired woman who is very, very close to the gentle port that men call by a dark name "Death," whereas it should be called "Joy harbor," since the soundings are clear all about it.

The skipper gave me a picture of the old ship running round the Horn under main and fore reefed topsails, and stays'l's, in a big brave sea; and also charts without number, and the collar of the old ship's dog for my dog of today.

AN OLD wrinkle-eyed sea-captain, who dwells high in hills upon a farm where pears and nuts grow, when my old skipper, introducing me, said: "Here's one of my apprentices. He's gone to writing sea-stories," said, "Then I'll tell him some, too." And he told me, with both hands on his knees, and his stubby body bowed forward, and his eyes sea-bright as the sun on the tides of dawn, the story of "Wag-hasb, the ship's dog," and the tale also of the rooster which made soup for thirty scurvy-rid sailors in the China sea.

And as long as there's a laugh to go round who cares if our bellies are empty and the cracks in our palms are sore? When the winds of the Horn wail by? We are men, the sons of men, and the singers of chanteys that shall ever be deathless, are we not?

Weaver asked me if I wuz religious. A hard thing to answer. There are few indeed who are not so. But tastes and opinions vary so.

I have been toasting three captains in whisky as old as themselves.

How should I know whether I am religious? And what does it matter? As long as my hands haul on the sheet and I know the rollick of the chantey.—BILL.

HARRY D. COUZENS, whose complete novelette appears in this issue, died in Arizona in May, 1914, after a long, brave fight against tuberculosis. Our reprinting "Brethren of the Beach" in enlarged form is explained in a note at the beginning of the story.

You old-timers will remember him, for his stories were favorites with you. Personally he was a man. If you knew him you liked him and admired him.

The following is from the *Arizona Republican* of May 20, 1914:

H. D. COUZENS was for many years one of the most prominent residents of Honolulu, T. H., where he held the position of chief deputy in the internal revenue service of the United States, and in that capacity gained distinction for efficiency in the performance of the duties of an office which, in that territory where smuggling and other illicit practises were unusually prevalent, required the exercise of much hardihood and courage.

During his residence in Honolulu and later in Los Angeles and New York, Mr. Couzens worked assiduously at writing and painting, in both of which arts he gained a wide reputation. Although his pictures, depicting different phases of the tribal life of the natives of Hawaii and of aborigines of other parts of the world, brought him repeatedly into favorable prominence in the United States, his greatest reputation was earned as a writer of adventure stories full of the tang of the South Seas and accurately descriptive of the islanders and of the varied types of white men who live among them. His knowledge of these people was obtained through personal association during his living and voyaging among the myriad islands of the southern seas and his writing was correspondingly true to life.

HE WAS, I think, the subject of the first of those informal talks that grew into our "Camp-Fire" department—when only the page facing the opening page of an issue was used for the purpose. In those first days the author did not talk direct to readers but sent me the material from which I made my little "talk."

THE following is his letter to me, giving me the information I used in that first talk:

Born Virginia. Ancestors, father's side, long line of sea-captains back to Matthew Couzens, original settler at Newport, who was captain of British privateer. Hence roving disposition, I suppose. Educated and intended for civil engineer. Left New York in 1886 for Honolulu where I lived 4 years, returning in 1890 to New York intending to finish my engineering course and continue as the successor of my grandfather, Matthew K. Couzens, a civil engineer of Yonkers, N. Y., but found I was too good a draftsman. Had always done drawing and painting after a fashion but decided to take up art seriously as a career. I studied at the Art League and the old William M. Chase school on 23rd Street and later went to Paris where I studied in the Julian school and in the studios of Carolus Duran and J. L. Gérôme. As I had no funds for this, I was obliged to earn every cent as I went along and my years of study were a period of some privation upon which I do not look back with much pleasure. I have a house in Paris, or rather the little suburb of Renard, which I haven't seen for fifteen years.

IN 1899 I left New York for Honolulu and lived there till 1907. In 1900, when the islands were formally annexed to the U. S. I was appointed Chief Deputy in the Internal Revenue service and held that office in Honolulu till 1906. From 1907 till 1909 I lived in San Francisco when, by special request I accepted the appointment of Chief Deputy of Internal Revenue in Los Angeles. California had been divided into two official districts and my services were in demand as an expert to help them establish the new Southern District. I accepted a 60-day appointment but at the end of that period was asked to officiate for 60 days longer and did so. I came to New York in 1910, returning to Los Angeles in January, 1911, to settle some business matters.

SO MUCH for bare facts. These as they stand are not particularly interesting and you can utilize them as you see fit. The real stuff that you want I'll try to string along at random. For instance:

I have cruised in the South Seas, have chummed with traders, blackbirders, beach-combers, remittance-men and sailors. Kipling once said that if one lived at Port Said long enough he would meet everybody in the world. I think this is truer of Honolulu than it is of Port Said—at least you'll meet them there in less time. I met Robert Louis Stevenson in King Kalakaua's stand at the old race-track, and I've sat with Jack London on the lanai of the Seaside Hotel and heard him roast his critics by the hour. I have gone back and forth across the Pacific on Army transports and found old schoolmates in captain's uniform seated opposite me at mess. I think I have as large a nodding or speaking acquaintance as any man in the world.

This may be trite enough stuff and I realize that you want things you can use to advantage. It is harder, I assure you, to write this sort of thing than episodic fiction. I may say that my best friend in Honolulu was Captain Albert H. Otis, who was captain of the yacht "Casco" when Stevenson took his celebrated cruise, and who is the original of "Captain Nares" in "The Wrecker." He, dear man, has been the unconscious original of more than one of my fictitious sailor-men.

I HAVE slept out in the hills in the quest for moonshiners, and being entirely an out-of-door man by instinct and inclination have ridden horses of all tempers and breeds, sailed boats of all rigs, and used firearms of all descriptions since I was too young to remember. Revolver-shooting is a hobby and I have several trophies for revolver and shotgun work. Like Stevenson, I too have slept out in Portsmouth Square under the sky; and, like him too, all my life I have tried to write and seen my most ambitious efforts (essays, etc.) overlooked. Here the resemblance probably ceases.

I HAVE always had the inclination for literature and have been actually writing for publication since 1894, when a story of mine which appeared in *Outing* fired me with the ambition to peg away and make good in this way, but it was later, when I was in the Revenue Service in Honolulu, that I began to tackle the real stuff. I used to go down to the office in the old Palace and plug away on my stories (sometimes all night long) and many of my things that are appearing now are the direct result of that patient industry. Some of it I sold, but I hoarded the rest against the great idea of coming East to the proper market for it and making good.

I was actually on my way to New York with this idea when I reached San Francisco in 1907. Then I reasoned with myself something after this fashion: I knew San Francisco, after a fashion, but I knew no one there who would be of the slightest use or help to me, whereas in New York I had friends and influence. Why, then, would it not be a good idea to "try it on the dog?" In other words, see if I could make good there first. I set myself a mark. It was to sell *Sunset Magazine* a good story (one that I approved of myself), illustrated by myself and then I would keep on my way East.

Well, I did it. I sold them a good many other things, cover pictures, illustrations, etc., and did considerable work for the art department of the Southern Pacific. I turned out stuff for various publications including the *Western Field*, the *News-Letter* and *Crocker's* monthly and had various interests with engraving firms and lithographers that kept me pretty busy. I felt in the beginning that I was taking a sporting chance. That was my reason for stopping there in the first place, but as soon as they published "On Mokapu Beach" with my illustrations I packed my trunks.

Then came the appointment to the District of Southern California and I spent the following year there looking out for the interests of Uncle Sam, shooting quail and ducks and catching rainbow trout—altogether a busy and interesting year.

I THINK this is about all. I know you don't want anything of the personal adventure stuff in this else I could branch off into various flights. Perhaps you can find enough to answer your purpose in what I have written here. You might dwell on the fact that the South Seas and its people and what men do with schooners have been the things of particular interest to me and I have made an effort to set some of them down in an interesting way. I'm still trying of course and I trust that *Billy Englehart* and I will have many a wild cruise together. The company of that celebrated ruffian is meat and drink to me, as *Billy Bones* says.

YOU will be interested to know that the O. Henry Memorial committee in awarding the prizes for the best stories of the year chose as one high on their selected list "Rra Boloi," by Crosbie Garstin, published in our magazine during 1921. Unfortunately when they wrote to find out whether Mr. Garstin is an American—prizes can be given only to stories by American authors published in American magazines—the facts compelled me to tell them that he is an Englishman.

Here is part of a letter from Mrs. Ethel Watts Mumford of the prize story committee:

I am sorry that we can not include Mr. Garstin's story in the 1921 O. Henry Memorial Book. The prize judges passed upon it with a most unusual unanimity as the best horror story of the year. It might interest Mr. Garstin to know that Dr. Williams has been using it in the short story course at Columbia University as an example of excellent construction. In the opinion of the committee Mr. Garstin is to be congratulated on an excellent piece of work and we hope to read more from his pen in the near future even if we may not include him among our American authors.—ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD.

SOMETHING from Captain A. E. Dingle in connection with his story in this issue:

Hamilton, Bermuda.

A bit of dope about *Joe Monkeyface* may be acceptable, since he was a live human being. When I was just about out of my apprenticeship in sailing ships, in my home town, Oxford, England, I saw, while on leave, a pitiful little devil being dragged around town by his half imbecile mother, and being made to dance for ha'pennies. He was called Joe Monkeyface, as in the yarn. When I secured my second mate's berth, I asked the Old Man to take Joe as a cabin-boy or deck-boy. He refused when he saw the lad, but I cajoled him around and Joe sailed with us to Australia and around the world home.

Joe never amounted to much as a man; his early life was all against giving him a chance; but he did, once, fight with tooth and nail another boy on the Railway Pier at Melbourne until he dropped, to avenge ill-treatment of a mangy cat. And when we docked in London again, eighteen months after sailing, I managed to get Joe taken into a Home as an easy-going roustabout, where he still was at last hearing, though no longer a boy, but a quiet, gray-haired, old-young man with a peaceful, if not eventful, end before him. Cheerio!—DINGLE.

F. R. BECHDOLT stands up to make acknowledgment and to give his very appreciative thanks to those of you who have helped him in securing authoritative data for his new series of articles on incidents and characters in the history of the West. Also, the following in particular:

Carmel, Monterey Co., Cal.

I would like to make acknowledgment in "Camp-Fire" to Mr. D. F. McCarthy of Lipscomb, Texas, who has gone to no little trouble in looking up old books now out of print and in furnishing me with reliable data which came under his own knowledge for this and other articles. I made Mr. McCarthy's acquaintance at Camp-Fire and, aside from the pleasure of the correspondence, it has proven indeed valuable to me.—F. R. BECHDOLT.

THE following from a pamphlet issued by A. McLane, one of our comrades, contains some things worth thinking about:

Cripples

By Red the Rambler

ONE of the petty annoyances of being conspicuously crippled or deformed is the amount of unnecessary questions asked of the one who is marked by the noticeable affliction. We make allowances for sympathetic or business inquiries.

But when one must tell probably a couple of dozen of folks every day just why, when and where he got "knocked out" it gets decidedly monotonous.

During the sixteen years I carried a "bum flat wheel" and the month or two since the same was amputated I have answered thousands of questions on this subject. I have made it a rule to give satisfactory replies when the inquiries were in earnest and had good reasons for asking. But often when a little "grouchy" I have left an over curious questioner as much in the dark, by my replies, as before. For instance: In St. Louis, Mo., I informed a little darky on one block that I have fallen out of a well. "Lawdy," he exclaimed, his eyes bulging. On the next block I explained to a stranger the way a steam boat had run over my leg. On block No. 3 I dispensed to questioner No. 3 the information that I was once kicked by a canary bird. Now I tell them that my leg was bitten off!

Speaking of maimed people the question is often asked. Why are cripples, when placed at work they are capable of performing, often the most steady and reliable of workmen?

There are several reasons for this: One is that one who is physically handicapped feels the unconscious challenge of the world to make good in competition with able-bodied men. Another is the self-respect that comes from "holding down" what may be a disagreeable, hard and uncongenial "job" in order to be self-supporting and independent.

MOST cripples understand fully why it is more blessed to give than to receive. Therefore they try to make their own way in the world rather than to fall back on the easier ("?") way of "bumming it." Often one hears remarks about the apparent cheerfulness of this class in general. I once heard a gentleman make the statement that it seems that the Creator purposely blesses the permanently invalid or crippled with a sunshiny disposition to counteract their suffering. Take it from one who knows, about 80 per cent. of the cheerfully afflicted are camouflaging; but all honor to those who suffer in silence.

Now, dear reader, we come to the real message, or, perhaps we should say, warning. If we substitute the almighty dollar for the simple religion of Christ, "The Golden Rule," then we are like unto the foolish surgeon who removed a man's perfectly good legs and substituted in their place a couple of pegs made of decayed timber.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Walter R. Marsden rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

New York City.

I've been watching the "Fire" for some time. I've even sneaked up close enough to listen in. Now that I've been caught at it, the outfit is doomed to listen to my tale of woe.

New York has the honor (?) of being my birthplace. I've roamed a few, seen a lot of the U. S. A. and some of Canada. I'm nutty about guns and hunting. At an early age I became an ardent follower of Nimrod. Considering guides a nuisance and an unnecessary expense, I went on a trip alone. I leave the rest to your imagination; among other things I succeeded in losing myself for three days in the woods. Tried to get into the big muss but got no further than camp on this side of the pond. How they finished the show without me still remains a mystery to me.

Well, I'm thinking I'd better amble out for some wood and give some other buddy a chance to orate. *Adios.*— WALTER R. MARSDEN.

HOW about wild horses in our West today? One of you asked at Camp-Fire, and here are some of the replies that came in. Any more information?

Tucumcari, New Mexico.

Wild horses are being exterminated by the stockmen of the West rapidly. Some because they interfere with the grazing of stock and more because some people just naturally have to have a shot at anything within range. Not very long ago (1919) I have been on a survey trip, through the Smoke Creek Desert and Buffalo Meadows in Nevada. These regions, as also Blue Wing Valley, Carson Sink, and eastern shore of Pyramid Lake, are full of wild horses and we have even killed two of them at the Coyote Pass.

These wild horses are just a little larger than Shetland ponies, weighing around five hundred pounds, and look like a small cow-pony.

It is very seldom you can get near them, except by surprize, but very often you can see them plainly when they are going to or from water. I have also seen them in Utah and northwestern Arizona. If any one wishes to see the wild horses just get on the train and have your ticket read *via* Western Pacific, Lovelock, Nevada. Get an outfit here and hike about fifty miles to Blue Wing

Spring, foot of Nightingale Mountains, and here you are certainly bound to see them.

Maybe some of you old-timers have been there and seen them. If so, speak up!—P. W. KOSSAR.

Oakland, California.

When I was a kid in the seventies wild horses were still very plentiful on the heads of the Smoky Hill and Republican Rivers in western Kansas, and I have seen many and helped capture some. They were not native to America, the horse having been introduced into Mexico by the Spaniards and spread northward among the Indian tribes by theft and barter. The wild horses were originally strays, mainly of the mustang type; that is, small, active, running all colors from yellow (buckskin) to black, with many spotted pintos, black and white, bay and white, yellow and white, all sorts of combinations of color.

AFTER travel set in across the plains runaways from the emigrant trains joined the wild bands and so quite a lot of racing and saddle blood was introduced and some of the wild stock were very fast, perfect, well-built animals.

If the settlement of the plains had been delayed another hundred years it is probable that the wild horses would have outnumbered even the buffalo, as they were more hardy, could graze a greater distance from water, and snow had no terrors for them. If there is grass, two or three feet of snow doesn't bother a horse; they will paw through it.

Along about 1895 horses were so cheap that in western Colorado many horse outfits wouldn't bother to look after or brand their stock, and the herds increased with incredible rapidity, so that in a few years it was necessary to shoot them by thousands for the hides, in order to save the grass for the cattle. This shows how rapidly they increase.

There were three methods of capturing wild horses. They could be run down and roped. That is, the slower ones could. They could be walked down. That is, a few men with pack horses could start after a band and keep them on the move. At first the horses would run clear away from their pursuers, but these kept steadily on the trail, and in a week or more the wild band would become so worn out from constant travel and lack of time to feed that they could be worked into a corral, as toward the last they became used to their pursuers and would barely keep out of their way. Horses have a well-defined range and would travel in a circle, which enabled the hunters to relay on them It was said that a party of Indians, say a war-party, that had been dismounted, has more than once walked down a band of wild horses and obtained fresh mounts.

THE third method of capture was to watch a desert water-hole, and when a band came and filled up, run down and rope as many as possible, as the wild stock was so full of water that they couldn't run. Horses will graze fifty miles from water if grass is scarce, coming in about noon every other day, and fill up all that their skins will hold. That's what makes desert-raised horses such long-winded brutes. From the day that they are born they spend their time running for water before they die of thirst, and running for grass before they starve.

As far as I know there have been no real wild horses on the plains since about 1885.

I overlooked, in giving methods of capture, creasing.

That is, shooting the animal through the top of the neck just forward of the shoulder, with a small caliber, hardened bullet, so as to make a small, clean hole. The shock would knock the animal insensible, and it would remain that way for several minutes, long enough to run up and hog-tie it.

OF course this was usually done at short range, not much over a hundred yards, although I have seen it done at much greater distance. But, at the long ranges the horse was generally either missed or killed.

These wounds would heal quickly and the horse would be all right in a few hours.

A little more wild horse dope inclosed. You remember that I told you the same thing happened in Colorado twenty-five years ago. These Montana horses must have come up in the last ten years, there were few, if any, then. They increase like rabbits. If hides were worth anything there'd be a chance for some one to make a stake killing them. —WM. WELLS.

Great Falls, Mont.

(The Associated Press.)—Approximately 70,000 wild cayuses roam Montana mountain ranges, eating forage and making themselves a general pest, according to Harry B. Mitchell, Great Falls, former member of the Montana Livestock Commission.

"These horses are not wild in the sense of being vicious or dangerous," said Mitchell. "They are merely roaming at large. Suggestion has been made that the State kill them but authority is lacking. The livestock commission has authority to take up vagrant horses and sell them, using the money derived from the sale to pay the cost, but sale is impossible. No one will buy them."

The wild horses against which the stock growers are directing a fight are the descendants of Indian cayuses, scrubby little animals of 600 and 700 pounds. In the early days of the State, they were occasionally gathered and sold by the Indians for $2.50 to $7 each.

Seligman, Ariz.

Been in this section past Winter, spending much of my time in hills when roads and trails were open, and find many wild horses as close as thirty-five miles south of the railroad here, starting in at water-holes between the "grants" which begin about at that distance, and their numbers increasing as you turn toward Mt. Hope. From that point on south they may be found in herds of twenty and more.

Punchers in this section often build traps and bag them for their personal benefit. It is not always impossible to tame them down to make a good riding and cutting pony.

Also encountered several in southeastern Colorado buttes and cedar hills in 1912, but not as many there at that time as are in this section now.—BILLY WOOLREY.

National Stock Yards, Ills.

I arise to remark that there are thousands of "wild horses" and some few man-killers running to the range in many parts of the western U. S. There is however not a band of horses in this country that is not claimed by an owner. They no longer have free range, the ranches of today being well fenced. The insignificant "bronc" of former years has been supplanted by a good-sized, rugged Western horse due to the infusion of draft blood, these stallions having been turned in with bands of horses.

Thousands of range horses are marketed here every year and they are plenty wild, but the day of the handsome stallion proudly leading his band and roaming at free will is past and gone.—A. H. PENDLETON.

Livingston, Mont.

The wild horse is to be seen on a few of our ranges yet, although like some of our other wild animals, it has very nearly been exterminated.

I have seen and owned very serviceable horses that were caught out of some wild bunch, but for the most part they are undersized and not good for much of anything. Besides they are hard to break; it takes a man who understands them pretty well to break them properly.

I knew one horse that we caught down in the Cow Creek country in Nevada, fair size, well built, and with a disposition that was a cross between chain lightning and T. N. T., but for one who could handle him he was one of the best saddle-horses in the State.

In most localities where there are wild horses left, stockmen are killing them off, claiming that the wild horse is a menace to the range.

I have spent a fair part of my time running them and while I don't believe it pays from a financial standpoint, there is, or was, a fascination that draws one.

There is a rancher south of here who has a large ranch and plenty of money—the chance, of course, to take life easy—but of all things, he would rather run wild horses. He keeps a string of saddle-horses that have endurance and speed, and I think he can boast of having caught more "frizzies" than most of the rest of us who have tried.—MARION F. REESE.

San Diego, Calif.

I notice that this month you are asking about the wild horse supply. The Mexicans say that there are several bands existant south of the Colorado on the mainland, and that there are smaller bands still living on the plains and walking the *caminos* of Baja California, in the northern district. I have never seen any there, but unshod tracks are numerous in many of the draws. There are hundreds of wild burros all through the Peninsula, and it would undoubtedly stand to reason that many horses have strayed south of the American line. Few Americans travel in the desert regions, and it certainly would be a stunt to get any horses out that were there now.

Zane Grey described the wild-horse bands in a book about his lion-lassoing visit south of the Colorado. His description was vivid and true and perhaps would give another line on the existing horse bands. I can not recall the name of the book, but it is in almost every public library. It is almost inconceivable that the horse bands would die out, for the country is almost inaccessible, and there are thousands of miles of desert for the horses to cover. —CHAS. M. STETSON, JR.

TWO of our comrades, A. Krombach and Lee Whitestone, are probably now in the South on their year's trip touring the border of the whole United States in a light six-cylinder car. They write that they are using the Camp-Fire Stations to have their mail forwarded and will visit as many Stations as possible along their route.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club or resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Alabama—50—Fairfield. Percy E. Coleman, 405 Forty-fifth St.
California—44—Oakland. Lewis F. Wilson, 836 Seventh Ave.
  28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, care of Gen. Del. No. 2.
  38—Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.
  60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
  73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
  74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
  89—Magalia, Butte Co., K. W. Mason.
Connecticut—86—New Haven. C. S. Roberts, 457 Fayerwether Hall, Yale University, Elm Street and Blount Ave.
  103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.
Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 13th St. and First Ave. N. E.
Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald.*
Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
  90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
Illinois—47—Peoria. B. H. Coffeen.
  66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
  67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
  77—Chicago. John Bradford Main, H. Company, 1st Inf. Ill. N. G., 16th St. and Michigan Ave.
Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
  56—Cape Cottage. E. Worth Benson, P. O. Box 135.
  59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
Maryland—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke. 1200 E. Madison St. at Asquith.
  82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
Massachusetts—26—Malden. Arthur R. Lloyd, 16 Cross St.
  49—Fitchburg. G. R. Wyatt, 66 Lunenburg St.
Michigan—27—Marquette. T. Mitchell, Box 864, G. P. O.
  69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1133 Lincoln. Ave., N. W.
  79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News* 100½ N. Washington Ave.
  80—Detroit. R. A. Taylor, 5129 Maybury Grand.

Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Box 244.

Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt, 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.

Nebraska—95—Omaha. C. Wolff, 119 No. 16th St.

New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.

New Jersey—17—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard, P. O. Box 13.
16—Bayonne. J. D. Gray, 92 West Sixth St.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, care of Reed, P. O. Box 431.

New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
42—Yonkers. A. F. Whegan, 173 Elm St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
93—Rochester. Thomas C. Murphy, 62 Swan St.

North Carolina—92—Asheville. B. Taylor and C. M. Gravatt, The Southern Spar and Mica Co., 322 Haywood Bldg.

Ohio—13—Cleveland. Wayne Eberly, 602 National City Bldg.
58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, E. Third St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water Street.

Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.

Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.

Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P.& R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
78—Pittsburg. Peter C. Szarmach, 320 Bareton St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.

South Carolina—8—Allendale. Ed. N. Clark, Editor-owner *The Tri-County Record* and Allendale *Advance.*
97—Charleston. Jack Mette, Navy Yard.

Texas—54—Houston. M B. Couch, Route 2, Box 189.
99—Beaumont. D. E. Jonson, 784 Orleans St.

Washington—3—Republic. A. E. Beaumont, Box 283.
1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven, Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book Store, 1330 First Ave.
7—Mount Vernon. Ed. L. Carson.
71—Charleton. Elmer E. McLean, Box 561.

West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.

Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, Room 9, Tenny Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. 2, 150 Biddle St
72—Kenosha. Leland Birchard, 304 Marion Ave.

Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, 52 Emmaline St., Northcote: and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Melbourne. Chas. M. Healy, "Oora," Abbott St., Sandringham.

Canada—31—Vancouver, B. C. C. Plowden, B. C. Drafting & Blue Print Co.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. Thos. Jocelyn
4—Dundedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto, Harry M. Moors, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 172½ De Meurons St.
10—Montreal, P. Q. Nelson J. Cook, 2037 St. Catharine St.
30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy St.
62—Tweed, Ontario. George L. Catton.
53—Toronto. W. A. Bach, 206-208 Victoria St.
85—Ontario. J. Wonal, Simcoe St. S., Oshawa.
102—Amherst. Lloyd E. Mac Pherson, 5 Belmont St.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Auditor, No. 1 Cerro.

France—61—Paris. Walter Denman, 19 rue Auber.

Great Britain—65—North Wales. William J. Cooper, "Kia Ora," Plastirion Ave., Prestatyn.

Honduras, C. A.,—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.

Porto Rico—46—San Juan. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 944.

Spanish Honduras—70—Jos. Buckly Taylor, La Ceiba.

That Cowboy Picture

THE art editor has the floor. In the December 30th issue we published a picture of a cowboy riding a steer and asked you whether or not the artist was a man or a woman—familiar or unfamiliar with his subject. Also we sort of half promised a year's subscription for the best answer. As I handle the pictures the job fell to me. That's where the rub comes.

Some of us in the office have a bowing acquaintance, only, with cattle, and after having read the hundred-odd letters received, filled with details of their vicious habits, especially when ridden, we're content to let it go at that. We have never measured a steer's tail, nor have we circumnavigated its belly; we don't even know whether its horns twist in or out. And yet we have received dozens of letters calling attention to just those points.

Expert cowmen among you have written in saying that the picture is correct in every detail; other cowmen, just as well qualified, tell us that the picture looks as much like a llama or a love-sick gnu as it does a steer.

If this particular steer could read, the only thing he would be sure about himself is that he has four legs! You all agreed on that!

Thirty-six per cent. of the letters said the artist was a woman, thirty-one per cent. thought he was a man; thirty-three per cent. did not care to express an opinion. Sixty per cent. thought the picture was true to life and forty per cent. did not.

We received photographs proving that the picture was correct and that it wasn't. Some of you said that the picture was a photograph retouched. At least six of you recognized the artist's work and named him—Ross Santee.

And with that facing us we have to choose the best letter!

I think we may safely say that Mr. Santee knows his subject; he is a practical cowman himself. As to the merits of his drawing—after all, a picture is not a photograph, nor should it reproduce every detail with photographic accuracy; rather its purpose should be to stir the imagination. And so I think the following letter wins the year's subscription.

If we ever run another contest we'll choose, for our own peace of mind, some nice simple subject like a triangle or a perfect square—nothing so complicated as a bucking steer.—L. B. BARRETTO.

Hot Springs, Arkansas.

In spite of page 130 of Dec. 30th *Adventure* being addressed to Cowboys, I think a statement from outside that great fraternity is not out of place.

The drawing is that of Ross Santee. His work by its very dash and possible exaggeration, gives the same feeling one has on seeing the frantic performance of a cowboy and accomplice.

In art this impression of life is the great thing. The technical detail and minutiæ are not what a thoroughly thrilled audience is thinking about.

And when an artist succeeds in interpreting so vividly the cowboy and his spirit, I think the matter of detail, correct or incorrect, is unimportant, as it is in reality, compared to the anxiety as to whether the cowboy stays on or not.—FRANCES HORDIN.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free ***provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.*** We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Dec., 1910; Aug., Jan., Oct., 1911; 1912, all but June, Aug., Sept.; 1913, Aug., June, July, Oct.; all 1914; 1915, all but June; 1916, all but May, Aug.; 1917, all but June, July, Aug., Mid-Oct.; 1918, all with extra First Jan., and Mid-July; 1919, all but Mid-Aug.; all 1920; all 1921 to First July. Over 130 magazines for twenty-five dollars.—Address JOE KOBERNA, JR., 3799 East 53rd St., Cleveland, Ohio.

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Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific Banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

★***(Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)***

14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
Charles Beadle, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

16. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
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17. Africa Part 5 Morocco
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18. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
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19. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

20. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

21. Balkans
J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Albania, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. South America Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas; Brazil (except Pará and Amazonas), Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras; British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

25. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

26. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

27. ✠ Canada Part 1
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

28. ✠ Canada Part 2
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

29. ✠ Canada Part 3
George L. Catton, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

30. Canada Part 4
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

31. Canada Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, Mount Vernon, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

32. ✠ Canada Part 6
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

33. ✠ Canada Part 7
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick,Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

34. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

35. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals,; mountains.

36. Western U. S. Part 2
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

37. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

38. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
John B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

39. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

40. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks. Automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

41. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Howard A. Shannon, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

42. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Hapsburg Liebe, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

43. Eastern U. S. Part 4
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 79 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

Robert Frothingham, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. Arthur Bent, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. Binda, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

Touring

RAYMOND S. SPEARS has prepared the subjoined circular for free distribution. If after reading it you desire it for permanent reference you may obtain it, printed on tougher paper than we use in the magazine itself, by writing him at Little Falls. Remember to enclose stamp and self-addressed envelop:

I'm sending to have printed into another "Ask Adventure" information slip, "Touring," which covers briefly some 50,000 words I wrote out some time since to cover this phase of wandering.

I've put into it particular information to answer most specific questions and a good many general questions about touring. It will save a good many thousand words writing in letters, if touring-season inquiries of the past are any criterion.

Probably half those who want to go want to earn their way; some want to do it trapping, hunting, being gay cowboys, etc. So here's another slip, copy for which I enclose, "Earning One's Way." A lot of women, young and old (one 55 years) are growing wings on their feet, too. "Big Jim" Harriman writes me about two "well-educated" girls who asked if laced boots or oxfords would be best, walking from Minneapolis to Yellowstone Park and the Grand Cañon—oxfords, in the desert sands! Big Jim just sighed.

Well, here's the leaflet on "Touring." The one on "Earning One's Way" will appear in an early issue—maybe the next one, seeing the subject is so timely at this time of year:

THE highways and by-ways of the United States offer infinite variety of scenery, experience, opportunities and delight. Road maps can be had for any State through local book or stationery stores, or through any automobile clubs. Study the maps. Go on foot, bicycle, motor-cycle, any kind of automobile in good condition; many wander with horses, and prairie schooners are still met throughout the West.

On foot, one carries his outfit in a pack on his back; a splint basket is good; army, leather, and other packs can be had. For cooking, frying-pan, two nesting pails with covers, the larger holding about 5 pints; frying-pan; toasting-fork, 15-inch handle; a tin tray for table; cutlery; two plates, cup; perhaps small wire grid; an all-wool blanket; water-proof canvas larger then blanket; cloth bags to carry grub; matches in water-proof safe; a stout jack-knife with three good blades; a vest-pocket camera and two rolls of film for each day. Weight not over 40 lbs.; lighter would be better. This is a bicycle outfit, too, except the basket; pack in canvas bags for luggage carrier. No weapon is needed for protection. Be sure to wear thick-soled shoes for walking.

For motor-cycle: As above; also, small Baker-model tent, ground-cloth sewed in, jointed poles; more grub; can of water. Keep weight under 75 lbs., especially if two go.

Automobile touring outfits depend on car. Just as necessary to go light as when on foot, however. Generally speaking, not more than five people should go in seven-passenger car; three or four in five-passenger car. But children to the full number of seats, or more, adapt themselves; but they must have room to wriggle and stretch.

Total outfit should not weigh more than 100 lbs. for each person. For children, simplest, plainest, easiest washed clothes—bloomers, knickers, etc. For men, light, comfortable garments; knickerbockers, long stockings, negligé shirts, light-weight shoes; but have heavy shoes along, and also several changes of clothes on long tour. Have close-woven woolen shirts, rather than sweaters, two or three light, all-wool shirts better than one heavy one. Skirts about two yards wide for medium-weight women, reaching to shoe-tops; shoes for varying weather—light to ride in; several light garments serve better than one heavy. Very light caps, if any, as a hat cuts the forehead. A rainproof for each individual. Each one should have duffel in bag or suitcase, old and young ones.

Individual cots, all-wool bedding, and perhaps cord hammocks. Two can sleep in touring-car on a car-bed, and sometimes all will sleep in their seats, wrapped in blankets—and sleep well, too, after experience.

A light-material tent—8-ounce say, waterproofed with something that will not dry hard, check or mildew, which one can put up—is the only kind to have. Any outfit that takes more than 30 minutes to make into a comfortable camp is a failure. Sould pack in less than 40 minutes. But 90 per cent. of auto-touring outfits are failures because of overweight and complications.

Special automobile cooking and eating outfits are desirable, all nesting in boxes. A party of four may well carry six-person outfit, however. Carry a good grid. A small, two-burner gasoline stove with wind-break is good. Every outfit, everywhere, should carry water-cans on running-board. A sheet-iron stove is common on the road. Two, 3-gallon half-moon cans, wool-covered, fastened to ringbolts for drinking and radiator are good. Keep full of best water available. Gallon can for oil; fill gasoline tank at every pump in open country.

Have dust-proof cupboard for food. Carry several days' supply. Have quick-meals for emergencies. Buy fresh meat, fruit, vegetables at towns recommended by other tourists as good places to patronize. Cupboard for food behind front seats with doors to use for table is good notion. A light, dressmaker's table and a tray for each member of party add much to eating comfort.

Pack all bedding in light, water-proof canvas bags. Roll everything into bundles, in water-proof canvas sheets. Don't have any bundle weight more than fifty pounds. Lash each bundle separately, and then tie fast with separate line or cinch-canvas strap to ringbolts on running-board, trunk-carrier, or whatever, according to make of car. Big canvas cover-all on trunk-carrier, to fold over and lash, is good idea. Pack tent in separate roll, covered with wear-saver of canvas sheet, say the ground-cloth. Carry net twine, trot-line, (six hanks, say) and 50 ft. of rope for towing.

Make lists of each part of outfit, food, cooking and table wear, bedding, and individual kits. Keep every variety separate, in packing bundles.

A Baker-model, lean-to tent beside the car, with ground-cloth sewed in, and flap doorsill as high as the running-board, keeps out wind, rodents, and other undesirable things. Or large, detached, waterproofed ground-cloth, folded into the tent ground-cloth all around, and up on the running-board, is good. Don't carry a mattress. Two or three layers of felt, quilted with bed-ticking, which may well be waterproofed, will serve to sleep on ground-cloth. For mosquitoes, cheese-cloth curtains, tucked and laced or pinned all around.

Before undertaking a long journey, try outfit several nights, running out, making camp, and coming in in the morning. This saves carrying useless things, emphasizes what must be taken, and gives the party practise in making and breaking camp—which is indispensable for comfort, peace and knowing.

Strange roads are *always* dangerous where least expected. Take no chances. Twenty miles an hour is the limit with a loaded car; 125 miles a day, a trip limit; and west of the Mississippi 80 miles a day is enough. Have main meal for noon hour, resting and eating. You may not find a good camping-place till midnight, or break down.

Don't hurry. Better 2,500 miles and enjoy it, than 5,000 miles and lose joy from weariness. Rushing spoils a trip, killing all one travels for. Children must have exercise and play.

Cold-cream, theatrical cream, etc., for dust and alkali-water effects on the skin. Eat fruit. Camp early; keep camp-sites clean; help the other fellow.

Automobile expenses are according to the make and driver. Accidents and breaks come from haste. Most tourists figure from $100 to $200 a week expense for a car and its occupants, including everything, when running six days a week. Car expense stops when the party stops, however. Take one day a week for greasing, oiling, tightening up, and cleaning car; this saves a lot of money. Starting with car in perfect condition, new tires and outfit, all expenses of a car are no more than around home, per mile. Each person in the car may live on one dollar or less a day. Careful drivers seldom have accidents. Don't start with old tires and expect to escape tire trouble.

A good spot-light; a handy light; flash-lights; and a bulb on a long wire with plug for switching in battery to light road-signs, motor, car, campground and tent, are worth the expense and trouble. But don't run with spot-light burning, as these are illegal in some States and places. Keep brakes, lights, horn, ignition, motor, gears, tires, in perfect order.

For firearms; good revolver or pistol; a .22 automatic is as good as any, for practise; a .22 single shot or repeater rifle; a 36 or 20 gage shotgun; a .25-.35 .30-30, or similar carbine rifle. Most States forbid concealed weapons without permit; and all States have game and non-resident hunting laws.

Fishing-tackle; steel rod for bait; casting, still and other fishing; tackle for the fish of the region to be visited.

Membership in automobile clubs, chambers of commerce, boards of trade, and other organizations, giving identification cards, auto licenses, etc., are invaluable in emergency of financial stringency, accident, etc., for cashing checks, obtaining favors of all kinds.

Be courteous; help the other fellow; observe all laws; be careful; don't be afraid. Camp in bared spaces, away from brush and stone heaps, and never leave a fire a minute. Clean the camp for the family that comes after you.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

A Cook-Island Questionnaire

FACTS, facts and more facts:

Question:—"Will you please give me information of the Cook Islands:

1. As to travel.
2. Climate and health conditions.
3. Snakes and poisonous insects.
4. Birds, animals and fish.
5. Resources and products.
6. Cost of living and commodities.
7. Should clothing, provisions and other things be taken along?
8. Customs duties on articles.
9. The people, their mode of living and friendliness.

10. Are there any articles a person could take to sell or trade to the natives?

11. Is there any way a person could make a living without special capital?

12. Where can I purchase any books, either statistics or writings by travelers, or any maps showing the general location of the different groups of islands of the South Sea?

13. How can I get to the Cook Islands, and at about what cost?

14. I am about fifty years old and slightly affected with tubercular trouble; would like to visit the South Sea Islands in a pleasant climate, and likely stay there if financial and climatic conditions were favorable.

15. Would a small motor-boat be of any special use, and could fuel be obtained?"—THOMAS J. HUGHES, Santa Maria, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—1. From your own city you can sail direct to Rarotonga, the center of the Cook Islands, on one of the New Zealand-U. S. S. Co's steamers, which leave San Francisco every three weeks for Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, calling at Rarotonga, which is less than a week's steam from Wellington.

2. Salubrious and healthy.

3. No snakes, but swarms of obnoxious bugs.

4. Few birds and animals but splendid fishing, and lots of it and then some.

5. Fruits and coconuts.

6. Simple fare, which Nature provides in profusion. Other commodities, being imported, about the same as in your own home town. Living a bit cheaper in the islands than in America.

7. No, you can get all requirements on the spot.

8. There is a fairly stiff protective duty imposed on imports, arranged on the scale of New Zealand's customs, the Cook group being a dependency of New Zealand.

9. The natives of the Cook Islands are closely allied to the Maoris of New Zealand and are of the same brown-textured skin. Coming under the influence of the London Missionary Society's missionaries a century ago, the Cook Islanders are more civilized, are better educated (speaking English like you and me) and live closer to European ideas than any other inhabitants of the Pacific Islands, and they are friendly to a degree toward all visitors from overseas.

10. Tinned goods of all kinds and pretty things that can be sold at a reasonable price appeal to the islanders.

11. It is not considered the proper thing for the white man to do anything but overseeing, but you would need to be on the spot to see what opportunities are offered, and you certainly should not make the venture without having money to help you along for some time.

12. If you are near a Carnegie or other public library you could look up the books published in America.

13. Answered in first lines, and the fare when I last inquired was approximately: Third-class, single, San Francisco to Rarotonga, $80.

14. I would not advise a tuberculous person of your age to go to the islands—not bracing enough; too enervating; and you would probably not be allowed to land.

15. A motor-boat certainly would be very useful; and petrol, etc., is available.

Fly-Fishing for Carp

THEY'RE evidently a better fish to catch than to eat. It's not necessary to catch one to know that; all you've got to do is to eat one, and you'll be quite sure:

Question:—"I will be very thankful to you if you will tell me how to catch fresh-water carp. We have a large fresh-water pond, and the feeder, pond and overflow are infested with carp that are rapidly exterminating the game fish therein. It is impossible to drain or net the pond as it is too large—about three miles long—while the rivers are much longer.

Aside from the fact that we would like to get rid of them we are also very anxious to find out what a large one would do if caught on a five-ounce fly-rod. Every once in a while we hear of one being caught, but to date have never been able to verify the tale. Personally I have fished for days at a time, using "night-walkers," white-bread dough and also raw white potatoes for bait, but to date have never had even a nibble.

What kind of bait do you advise? Should one fish deep or shallow? What time of the day and kind of weather is best? Should one use a float? What size hook should be used? Is it possible to use an artificial bait, liquid or paste? If so, what kind?"—C. L. D. HOSKING, Butler, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—A carp on a fly-rod will kick up an awful fuss, as much in fact as a bass of equal weight. They will bore, and not do the leaping of a bass.

Carp are deep feeders, and whether you are fishing in shallow or deep water keep the bait right on the bottom. The best luck I have had is with dough-balls made half of corn-meal and half of wheat flour, rolled into a ball, then dropped into hot water for a few seconds. It seems to toughen it, and is better for luring the carp. By adding chopped liver—very fine—to the dough-ball it has proven a better killer. Also I have chopped up dead minnows and worked them up in the dough. Speaking from my experience, this is the best bait I know of, and I have caught them with it in lakes and rivers when worms, dough and everything else failed me. Once in a while I have caught them on a trot-line with dead minnows by weighting it so it was entirely on the bottom.

A Trip to Japan.

VERY pleasant—if you have money. But not to be attempted "on spec":

Question:—"As I am contemplating a trip to Japan within a year I would appreciate your advice. Kindly answer the following questions:

1. What is the best time of the year to visit Japan?

2. What route and line would you suggest taking?

3. What are the traveling conditions throughout Japan?

4. What and where are the most interesting places to visit in the islands?

5. Are there many Americans in Japan engaged in commerce?

(Perhaps the following questions are going beyond your service; if so, please disregard them.)

6. Would it be possible for me to sell American

products in Japan, acting as a free-lance salesman for any lines I could secure?

7. Can you suggest a way to secure American lines?

8. Could I secure commissions to buy Japanese products for American houses? Can you suggest a way to secure commissions?

Please do not print my name or address in *Adventure* if forwarded there."

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—I will take your questions up as you have put them:

1. The best time of year to visit Japan is any time, in my opinion; but the tourist seasons of Spring and Autumn offer the best traveling facilities. From March to May and from September to November, both inclusive, the climate is delightful and the country everywhere is at its best.

2. The route and line to go are matters of individual taste. If you want to make a quick voyage there are the northern routes from Vancouver, Seattle or Tacoma—by boats of the Canadian Pacific Ocean Services, Ltd., Nippon Yusen Kaisha or Osaka Chosen Kaisha. If you want a longer sea experience, to keep in the sunshine belt and get all you can for your money, then sail from San Francisco on either a Pacific Mail S. S. Co. boat or a Toyo Kisen Kaisha steamer, and see Honolulu on the way. There's small choice in lines unless you prefer to patronize an American-managed one, or want to go on the largest boat, or want second-class accommodations—which, by the way, are often quite desirable. Get the folders of these companies.

3. It is fairly easy to travel about Japan. Railways connect all the larger towns and cities. Through trains have sleeping and dining car accommodations, and guards and train-boys who speak enough English for one to make his ordinary wants known. The ticket-sellers in the stations generally speak some English. There are many inter-island steamers. Autos, street-cars and jinrikishas are available for large-city travel, and 'rikishas are to be procured almost everywhere in the smaller towns and country. Public roads are under process of great improvement at present.

4. Yokohama, Tokyo, Nikko, Kobe, Nara, Osaka, Nagoya, Kyoto and Nagasaki are the cities you will want to see most of. The Thomas Cook and the Raymond Whitcomb tourist agencies, also the steamship companies above referred to, publish free booklets that will give you more extended information on this point. There's a regular route tourists are apt to follow, given in such booklets, and all places are interesting and each city has its own places of note. Visit some railroad general office and get all the pamphlets you can on Japan.

5. There are a goodly number of Americans doing business in Japan—just how many I do not know; the number has increased during the past two years with an increase of business interests between the two countries. Most of these manage some branch of some United States house, or represent in some way a large firm in America. There are a few Americans, however, who have established an independent business in the empire.

6. Anything is possible. But a free-lance salesman in Japan with no knowledge of customs or language would be working against tremendous difficulties.

7 and 8. The only thing I can suggest is that you take some periodical reviewing Oriental trade and markets and watch for suggestions and study the advertising to learn what houses are doing business in Japan. There are several papers of the sort published right where you are on the Pacific Coast. Go into some Oriental trading company and ask about such periodicals—they'll know what you want. Another is the *Trans-Pacific* magazine with an office in San Francisco.

Most American houses trading in the Orient prefer to send some one to buy who is trained in their own policies and who has had experience in Oriental buying.

Your best way would be to connect with some house which could use your individual abilities and training, or gather about your buying services a group of, say, small art-shops who want Japanese goods directly imported and can not afford to send their own buyer over. I met one very bright young woman several years ago who sold American candy in Japan, and while there bought goods at her own risk. These she brought back and sold to art-shops here at home.

There are many ways of making a success in the buying and selling game, even with great difficulties against one; but you want to be very sure of yourself before going into a field of strange language and customs. An American beach-comber in the Orient is not a pleasant thing to contemplate.

However, the will to do makes the way open to success, if you will hard enough and know what you are willing about.

Every good wish for your success if you do go over.

Prospecting in Alaska

BIG chance for the right man—after the boob has located the ore:

Question:—"A friend and myself have been thinking of going to Alaska to prospect and make our stake if possible. We have been told that it is useless to go there as it is all over and the only good places belong to Guggenheim. But I maintain there are deposits just as large as ever were found if you are a lucky guy.

What do you think? We mean to take a chance anyhow, and any information on your part will certainly be appreciated. Your info may also make us change our plans. We have prospected in most of the mineral States of the West and have 'roughed it' quite a bit but still have many things to learn, nevertheless consider ourselves well able to hold our own 'most anywhere.

Is a .30-30 large enough for Alaska? Is mackinaw clothing suitable for the Winter there? If not what is needed? Would $1000 be enough to outfit both of us for a Summer and Winter? If not how much would you suggest? What foods are necessary to keep a man in good condition in Winter? Would it be asking too much to have you explain what clothing and food are really needed as we would like to go as light as possible? Can maps be obtained from the Alaska Bureau in Seattle?"—ED. J. KIMBROUGH, Tompkins, Sask., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—I hate to steal you away from Canada, but Alaska needs you and your tillicum. Go up there by all means, especially if you can stay as long as you need to really make a stake.

You may like that prespecting proposition, but any mathematician who also knows a little gold statistics will tell you that your chance is one in a thousand. You can do far better mining after the prospector has struck it and a camp has grown up around the place. Mining is a business; prospecting is a sucker's dream. However, you're a prospector; and I know that breed too well (having been one myself for some years) to imagine I can convert him.

Alaska has just been scratched. A few big finds have resulted in big camps which are getting worked out now, but there are thriving small camps and big ones due to be located any time. Besides, the other mineral deposits are only now being opened up. Get in on the ground-floor right now. I usually discourage my correspondents from going to Alaska, but in cases of obvious fitness I take the other tack—as I'm doing with you.

The Guggenheims have some big propositions up there, but they cut no figure in small mining at all. They simply don't count in the mass of the industry.

I never advise taking an outfit from the States. You can usually get what you need better on the spot—more suitable stuff. For instance if you took mackinaw clothing to the north or west coast anywhere you'd be out of luck. But in the interior where the cold is *still*, almost entirely, it's the clear quill. And so with footwear and lots of things.

The local merchant gives you the stuff best for that locality. Besides, you're not encumbered with an outfit in the place where you wish you were not. If you aim for a particular locality, and it is not close to a trading-post (or even if it is and you know exactly your needs) then it's all right to take an outfit along. Otherwise not. It's usually "otherwise!"

Food means the same as here—and plenty of fresh when you can get it. Clothing ditto. But footwear is a little special. Otherwise same clothing with the addition of a parkey to be had up there. Footwear usually means a rubber-soled shoe-pack, or a "gold seal" short Goodyear for Summer, Fall or Spring, and the Eskimo or Indian mukluk or moccasin for dry weather in Winter, and German socks in the interior, and high mukluks and ordinary socks in the Winter on the coast. The south coast is just an ordinary Winter, and ordinary Maine clothes would be warm enough or too warm.

But why waste time on all that? Go up there and you'll soon see. Unless your destination is mapped out, any specific directions would be useless.

Yes, the Alaska Bureau will give you maps. Or, better still, the Geological Survey, Washington, D. C.

The English-Lion Legend

TWO members of our editorial staff have lived in the country discussed in the subjoined correspondence, but neither has heard of the legend referred to. Can anybody do anything to clear up the mystery?

Question:—"First, would you be kind enough to inform me if you know of any English newspapers now being published in Mombasa or Nairobi? Were any of these papers or weeklies, etc., published as far back as 1900?

I am seeking this information for the following reasons: I need clippings to substantiate the following story which is well-known in British East Africa, and which has been mentioned by visiting Americans in books, travel articles, etc. I, however, want the actual facts. This is the story. Perhaps you, too, have heard it and can shed some light upon the facts:

Between 1900 and 1909 a British adventurer absconded with his regiment's funds because of some trouble with a superior's daughter, and fled to the bush. Here he lived with the natives and led them in attacks upon the whites, poached ivory, etc. In one attack against the whites Lieut. Dick turned upon his native followers and fought with the whites because there was a woman in the *safari*. He was killed—this happened in the Kedong Valley—and was buried on the spot where he fell. The natives to this day call it the "Grave of the English Lion."

After his death, it was learned that he was a medal man. It was hung on a string around his neck. He is supposed to have shot twenty natives before his rifle jammed, then slew several with his rifle as a club. I understand that a mound of stones marks his grave. He lived with the Masai.

Several people have told the story in various fashions. I need the real facts. Can you help me out in any way, or suggest some method or person who can?

The story is authentic, but I may have the name wrong.

If you can help me, I shall be everlastingly indebted to you, and wish to thank you sincerely in advance for any courtesies you may extend me in this matter."—S. GORDON GURWIT, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—Enclosed you will find list of papers published in Nairobi and Mombasa since 1900.

Your story is very interesting indeed. I was in Uganda from 1905-07; but I've never heard the yarn—unfortunately, for had I done so I should certainly have used it in fiction.

I have repeatedly tried to get in touch with men I knew there, but everybody seems to have disappeared or died. As a suggestion you might try the editor of the *East African Standard* to give you the truth of the tale. I am very sorry I can't do more. Quaintly enough I'm right in the middle of a yarn in which a fellow goes amuck with sunstroke and turns against the whites! Whatever you try in fiction, fact, if it can be found, usually beats you to it!

Raising Game for the Market

IT'S legitimate enough, though in some States, if not in all, a permit to ship must be obtained:

Question:—"I read in the local paper recently that the U. S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is now legal to raise fowl and game for the market.

Please advise if you know anything of this ruling. For instance, could one raise quail in Arizona and ship them say to the California market?

Enclosed herewith find postage for reply, and thanks very much for whatever information you may be able to give."—C. B. CRAVENS, Florence, Ariz.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—*In re* raising game for the market, it is just as legitimate as raising sheep or hens or rabbits.

Here in southern California men are raising trout for the market and letting rabid anglers do fly-casting in their ponds at so much a fish. This they do all the year round and nobody says nay.

To ship quail to market in this State you would have to get written permission from your fish and game commission to maintain your game farm. Then you would have to have an agreement with our commission on the shipping part. Satisfy our commission that no illegally killed game would enter the State, I mean.

This will be harder to do, for the commission may think that such action would open the door to poachers who kill out of season and who might claim they bought domesticated quail outside our State.

Write to California Fish and Game Commission, Sacramento, California. Ask them about this matter. Then you are getting it right from the men who have the authority. It is a technical question and can only be authoritatively answered by the commission.

Pioneering in Bolivia

THE natural wealth is there, and the early birds will catch the biggest worms; but taking a family in is quite different from going it alone:

Question:—"I am very much interested about raising sheep or cattle in Bolivia.

Could you give me any information which State of Bolivia is best suited for my purpose? How is the exchange of money? At par or in favor of the U. S.? How much does it cost to go there, and which is the cheapest way?

How much does it cost to live there? What is the price of shoes, clothing, compared with here?

How many Indians, negroes and half-breeds live there? Is there any duty on hides and wool for export?

How far is suitable land from the railroad, and what is the fare per mile or kilometer? Is any timber on the land to build houses and stables or corrals?

Do you know how much it costs to have the land surveyed by a Government expert?

Can you give me any information about immigration and land laws?

I wrote for the booklet to the Pan-American Union. It says you can buy 20,000 hectares (49,400 acres) at 10 cents a hectare, but you must settle one family on every 1,000 hectares. On the same page it says an immigrant can not possess more than three lots or sections by purchase or other means.

I have about $3,500. Do you think it is enough to start? I have three boys, eleven, nine and six years old, and two girls."—CHAS. KLOEPPER, Eddysbane, Can.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—Bolivia is an immense country of some 600,000 to 700,000 square miles, very sparsely populated. I will try to give you an idea of what the surface area of this country is like. On the west is a range of mountains running north and forming the boundary with part of Chile and Peru. About sixty to eighty miles east is another range. The plateau lying in between averages about 12,000 feet above sea-level, and the tops of the mountains on each side run around 17,000 feet and some of them up to 22,000.

The eastern range-end nears the Brazilian border in the highest peaks of the Andean chain and slopes off into the lowlands of the upper Amazon basin. The western chain continues on north through Peru and Ecuador. These mountains and high plateaus comprise two-fifths of the total area of the republic.

East of the eastern range and north of the end of this range the country slopes off down to tropical country, and in the extreme southeastern part it slopes off into prairie country (*chaco*). Thus it is a case of finding the right altitude. The temperate zone is from 6,500 feet above sea-level up to 12,000; the cold zone, or *puna* region, is from this on up, and the tropical zone is from 6,500 on down.

There is a portion of country lying in a triangle roughly bounded on three sides by the Cochabamba, Misiones, and Oriental Mountains, that is called the "Bolivian Switzerland," a country much broken up and containing some of the most fertile valleys in the whole world. Some of the towns in this region are Cochabamba, Tarata, Potosi, San Pedro and Sucre. Roughly speaking, this country is some 100 to 200 miles southeast of La Paz, the capital. There are other similar regions after crossing the mountains and proceeding down on the eastern slopes in other parts, but this is a fairly well settled country and its resources are known.

Bolivia has an estimated population of some 2,500,000, over half of whom are pure Indians of various tribes, most of whom are tame and hard-working Quechuas. Thirteen per cent. are white, twenty-six per cent. are mixed white-Indian; a few Germans and other Europeans in the mining regions, with three out of a thousand black—descended from African slaves.

Sheep are raised in the temperate zone with a few raised in the lower part of the *puna* country at some 12,500 elevation. Goats are raised in the torrid country. Horse-raising was once a great industry in the north, and many are now raised in the country near La Paz. Mules are imported from Argentine by the mining companies.

Cost of living depends on how you live. If you live off of native food and buy same in the public markets you will be able to live cheaper than here; but if you buy imported food it will cost more than here.

The markets afford plenty of beef, both fresh and salt; mutton, fruits, potatoes, yams, etc.

Write National City Bank, New York City, for present exchange rate. I had a list but have misplaced it.

Cost of clothing also varies. The native people, especially the rural people, make a sort of cloth from llama wool which is heavy and coarse and very suitable for the highlands. For the temperate zones they wear linen and cotton suits which cost little.

Bolivia was once a free-trade country, and I am not up on the present duties either outgoing or incoming. I know they do tax some of the products, especially outgoing rubber and sugar. The Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Washington, D. C., should be able to quote such duties.

The fare used to be something like $38 from the coast up to La Paz. There has been a new line built which strikes the coast at Arica, Peru, and makes a shorter trip of it. I do not know what the fare is on this road at present as all fares have increased greatly since the European war.

The fare on the steamers has also increased greatly. It used to be $180 to Mollendo, but it is around $360 now first-class.

You have quite a family, and this undertaking is a pioneer job. The first few in there have the benefit if the country ever does come to the front, which it will no doubt do sometime. I had a letter three years ago from a man who had gone down and carved out a home far in the interior and was well satisfied. I wish I had not mislaid his letter.

But, brother, it is as near being out of the whole world as a man can get. Don't you think you could do your pioneering in a country that wouldn't be so hard to get to?

There is some mighty fine country in the highlands of Central America. I know you have the sand and grit to do the job with in Bolivia, but when you talk boys and girls to me it sort of takes the heart out of me. I sure don't want to see you make a mistake.

With the money you have, by going down there and looking around, even working for some of the tin-mines or railroads until you are sure you see the country you are looking for, keeping your money a secret to yourself, and then grabbing off a boundary of land from the Government, you could turn the trick. But make sure all the way along. She's a country that is primitive, and there are thousands of miles that are virgin country and that will produce anything.

The native Indians are humble and tame, except a few wild tribes in the very eastern part, and there would be no danger to your family, and by locating in one of the smaller towns they would not be lonely; but carving out a home in the wilderness is a pioneer job, as I have said.

See the Encyclopedia Britannica in some library and take a look at Bolivia for a general geographical sketch.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

WOULD like to hear from any of the gang that served in the Ambulance Co. No. 8 Corozal, Canal Zone, from 1915 to 1921.—Address JOHN F. DUFFIE, 256 Aspinwall Ave., Brookline, Mass.

HODGES, SEBASTIAN. Last heard of while in Key West, Fla., in 1920. One of the crew of the U. S. S. *Asheville.* Any news of him will be appreciated by an old-time friend and shipmate.—FARIS S. KING, 621 W. Flagler St., Miami, Fla.

BLOMSTERGREN, O. V. and HOAGLAND, R. L. Were in Prinzapulca, Nic., C. A., about 1909 and later in Spanish Consulate in Chicago. They can hear of their old friend Geo. Lemar by addressing—L. T. 439, care of *Adventure.*

DESCENDANTS of Michael E. McCaffrey of County Mayo, Ireland. One daughter married a man by the name of Rogers, and when last heard from lived in Pa. Another daughter married a distant relative by the name of McCaffrey. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. J. SCHUMAKER, 512 West Broadway, Louisville, Ky.

DESCENDANTS of John Walsh. Had a daughter who married Patrick Purcell. Last heard from lived in Indiana. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. J. SCHUMAKER, 512 West Broadway, Louisville, Ky.

WEATHERS, CHRISTINA. Home town, Boston, Mass. Last heard of in Lakewood, New Jersey, about 1911. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MISS ETHEL HOLMAN, 493 East 162nd St., New York, N. Y.

HANNIGAN, PAT. Last heard of in Seattle, Washington, working in a coal-mine. Five feet ten inches tall, dark-brown hair, hazel eyes. Has blue mark across top of nose—tattoo mark on one arm. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address H. M. KIERNAN, 807 Liberty St., Springfield, Mass.

TICKLE. Cousin. Have been trying to locate you. Called up Lester D's. Have important information. Letter waiting for you, care of *Adventure.* BETH.

ALFORD, JIMMIE LEE. Last seen and heard from at Malta, Mont., about eighteen years ago. Known around Butte, Mont., as Kid Lee. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WM. ALFORD, 217 N. Washington St., Spokane, Wash.

SEELYE, LAWRENCE COPELAND. Served during the Spanish War in Co. K., 2nd N. Y. Vol. Inf. Last heard from in 1905 when he lived in Peekskill, N. Y. Any information will be appreciated by his former captain.—Address LOYAL L. DAVIS, Glens Falls, N. Y.

DICKMAN, SGT. Ex. 39th Infantry 4th Div. and Clark of the 58th or 59th Infantry. 4th Div. A. E. F. Came back to the States in Casual Co. 2457; left Marseilles, France, April, 1919. Also any of the original outfit of the H. Co. 61st Infantry 5th Div. A. E. F. who went overseas in April, 1918. Any information will be appreciated.—Address ALLEN A. STUART, 7245 Raymond St., Swissvale, Pa.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CO. K. 11TH INFANTRY U. S. A. North Shore Post No. 21, Illinois Department of the American Legion would like to get in touch with the members and ex-members of that company. Particularly those who were friends of Sgt. Francis Earl Garland, who was killed in action on the Western Front.—Address FRANCIS A. WALSH, Service Man, 6253 Wayne Ave., Chicago, Ill.

WOLFF, ALBERT. Switchman. Formerly of Red Bud, Ill. Last heard of in 1886 in Minneapolis, working in a livery barn on 3rd Street South. Age about fifty-six. Sister born after he left would like to hear from him.—Address MISS ELLEN AMELIA WOLFF, 1919 Logan St., Murphysboro, Ill.

FALLON, FRANK. Last heard of in Weed, Cal. Was in Klamath Falls, Oregon, and Chiloquin, Oregon. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOHN FALLON, 207 Lexington Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

HARRISON, LEE. Uncle. Left home in Evansville, Ind., several years ago. Lived in Texarkana, Texas. Left there and last heard of was in the Klondike in Alaska. Tall, light hair, blue eyes. Age about fifty. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. CARRIE CLIFFORD CURTIS, R. 3 Box 12, McEwen, Tenn.

WAGNER, HENRY A. Last heard from August, 1917, from St. Louis. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address ALBERT STRASSHOFER, 1220 E. 71st St., Cleveland, Ohio.

WOULD like to hear from any of the members of the Coast Guard Cutter *Apache* or *Yamacran* who served during 1919. Also members of the crew of the Shipping Board Steamer *Colingsworth*, who were abroad at the time of the salvaging of the S. S. *West Waoneke*.—Address J. W. METTE, Navy Yard, Charleston, South Carolina.

HINTZ, HARRY. Last heard from in Los Angeles, Cal., in 1908. Age about forty. Father of five children. Wife died in San Bernardino. Was a tailor by trade. Short and heavy build. Any information will be appreciated as his children are very anxious to hear of him.—Address HERMAN R. ROESENER (formerly Russel Hintz) 4531 Staunton Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.

RELATIVES of Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Wilkey. Mrs. Wilkey died March 29, 1899, age forty-one years, leaving three children, the oldest being then five years. Children then sent to orphan home. Mr. Wilkey died in the Austin Confederate Home when seventy years of age. Any information will be appreciated.—Address BEN WILKEY, 509 East 3rd St., Austin, Texas.

SIMONSEN, STANLEY. Husband. A Canadian war veteran. Last seen in Elizabeth, N. J., April 2, 1921—suffering from loss of memory caused by shell-shock. Six feet tall, dark-brown wavy hair, dark blue eyes, slender build, age thirty years. Known as "Stanley the Physical Phenomenon" or "The Man Who Grows." May be in some hospital or institution. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. S. L. SIMONSEN, 52 Taylor St., Gloucester, Mass.

THE following have been inquired for in either the March 20th or March 30th issues of Adventure. They can get names of inquirers from this magazine:

BLACK, John Jackson; Blaine, Peggie; Bobonie, George; Brown, Geo. C.; Bensinger, Alf; Clapp Family; Dates, Alfred Thomas; Earl, Allen; Harries (or Harris) Hugh M.; Hurley, James; Jenkins, Chas. Westley; Johnson, Lawrence R.; Lane, Edward; Le Effe, Jack; Lockwood, Robert L.; LuValle, Alvin; Mahoney, Arthur; McCullock, Milan C.; McCulloch, Milan E.; McFarland, Edward; McLane, C. A.; McLaughlin, Stewart H.; MacLauren, Joe; Menard, Patrick; Nelson, Adolf; Owen, Jack; Parmeter, John; Reeves, John R.; Rucker, Lulu Williams; Scott, David; Shanghai, Pressey; Shepard, Harold North; Smart, William R.; Tolly, Frank; Ward, Walter G.; Weimer, Jacob; Wilson, Anna, Margaret and Edward; Wood, Marion; Wright, Cecil.

MISCELLANEOUS—Any of the old gang who were in Co. A. 40th Inf. from July, 1917, to January 18, 1919. Any of the gang who rode the No. 7 and No. 11 cars in 1918 and 1919.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

APRIL 20TH ISSUE

Besides the new serial and the complete novel mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

JOHN BLANKET'S LEAD DOG — ***T. von Ziekursch***
Friend—and enemy—of man.

THE SOUL OF A NATIVE — ***F. A. M. Webster***
Caught in a flash of lightning.

THE ASPHALT POOL — ***Paul L. Anderson***
Battle of monsters on sagging soil.

BY PROXY — ***G. A. Wells***
The *Yaqui Kid* meets an old-timer.

SHIPWRECK — ***Gordon Young***
Out of the depths.

THE FURIES — ***F. St. Mars***
When the weasels attacked the pheasants.

A SON OF STRIFE A Three-Part Story Conclusion — ***Arthur D. Howden Smith***
A Saracen foray against the castle of Nerak.

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Today it's a picture of Grandmother reading to the children. Tomorrow it may be Bobbie playing traffic policeman or Aunt Edna at the wheel of her new car or Brother Bill back from college for the week-end or—

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Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N.Y. *The Kodak City*

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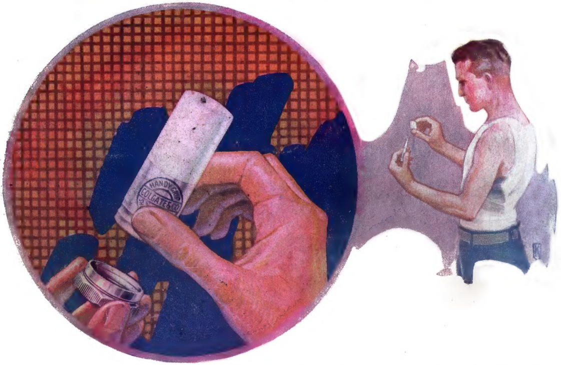
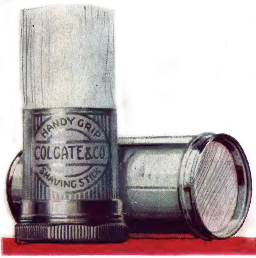


Putting a Colgate "Refill" in the "Handy Grip"

is like putting a new blade in a razor—easy and simple. The soap itself is threaded to screw into the socket. There is no waste.

With Convenience and Economy, you get Comfort also in shaving with Colgate's. The softening lather needs no mussy rubbing in with the fingers. It leaves your face cool and refreshed.

Colgate's Shaving Stick not only produces the most soothing lather for the average man but it is a little more economical in use than powder and much more economical than shaving cream. As we make all three, we can give you this impartial advice.



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The metal "Handy Grip," containing a trial size stick of Colgate's Shaving Soap, will be sent for 10c. When the trial stick is used up you can buy the Colgate "Refills," threaded to fit this Grip. Thus you save 10c on each "Refill" you buy. There are 350 shaves in a Colgate Shaving Stick—double the number you can get from a tube of cream at the same price.